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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to identify the school district characteristics that seem to explain the way districts adapt to pressures for change. The author hypothesized that all school districts can be characterized by one of three states: maintenance (they change practices and technologies but are stable in beliefs and structures that truly affect student learning), decay (their reactions to change jeopardize the long-term effectiveness of educational delivery), and development (they consistently implement and sustain changes that may affect performance). The goal of the research was to formulate preliminary conceptualizations rather than to test hypotheses or conduct an intensive field study. Five reputedly innovative districts were chosen for the study. A research team visited the districts in order to conduct interviews, attend meetings, observe classes, and collect copies of school district records. The data were used to formulate and compare the characteristics of a developmental school district and a maintenance one. Researchers theorized that the ideal developed school district is characterized by delivery diversity, integrated loose coupling, primacy of delivery concerns, boundary openness, and institutionalized change. (Author/JM)

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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF SCHOOL DISTRICT ADAPTATION

PREPARED UNDER A GRANT FROM THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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PREFACE

Educational reform and the improvement of school district practices have engaged policymakers and practitioners for more than a decade. Their concern has been to bring about change by adding new ideas and support and making better use of the resources at hand. The mixed results of these efforts have taught us that the problem of change is complex, and our understanding of the local change process is incomplete. Planned change efforts as well as the evaluation of these activities typically focus on a "special project" to the exclusion of other school system factors that can shape the choices and actions of project participants. This narrow perspective leads planners and researchers alike to misspecify or overlook important aspects of the local change process.

This report presents the results of research designed to examine planned change efforts in the context of the local school *system*. A major objective of the study was to identify, in a preliminary way, the factors and processes that shape a district's response to internal and external pressures for change. The research, funded by a grant from the National Institute of Education (NIE), was exploratory and involved intensive fieldwork in five school districts.

Two broad questions guided our fieldwork. First, as many students of school district behavior and planned change efforts have commented, "The more things change, the more they remain the same." Why is change so often ephemeral or illusory? Such disappointing outcomes are sometimes explained in terms of "resistance to change" or inadequacy of project design. Although these explanations are sometimes accurate, they do not account for the failure or lackluster achievement of many local change efforts.[1] We wanted to explore why change is so difficult to bring about and to sustain.

Second, previous work suggested that some school districts consistently manage their affairs better than others. These "exemplary" districts seem able to maintain the stability of their educational system while successfully introducing program and organizational changes that improve educational services. Are there observable and systematic differences between these districts and "average" districts, or is their superior performance due to idiosyncratic, temporary, or chance factors and events?

The case materials presented in this report examine these questions in terms of the social, political, and organizational realities of the school districts. The conceptual framework that is developed from these materials suggests some preliminary answers, which may constitute a first step in understanding the behavior of school systems and their response to pressures for change.

[1] Paul Berman and Milbrey W. McLaughlin, *Federal Programs Supporting Educational Change*, The Rand Corporation, R-1589/7-HEW, April 1977.

SUMMARY

The literature suggests that school districts "innovate" yet do not change in significant ways. This exploratory study explains such behavior in terms of organizational dynamics, not the characteristics of a planned change effort. We argue that (1) the adoption of an innovation can serve as a defense mechanism for school districts in their need to respond to the uncertain environment; (2) during implementation, an innovation is adapted so that it reinforces rather than replaces existing organizational patterns; and (3) the same organizational conditions perpetuate the illusion that change is occurring. In short, adaptation without improving or significantly changing performance can be viewed as part of a mechanism whereby school districts maintain the status quo.

This explanation raises basic questions that go beyond issues of planned change. How do school districts adapt and change over time? What organizational patterns and what conditions in the institutional setting explain their adaptive behavior?

To explore these issues, we examined the responses of five school districts to internal and external pressures for change. Our field research was guided by a conceptual framework that made three general assumptions. First, we assumed that all school districts must face and resolve five common problems:

- Diversity in the quality of educational services.
- Coordination and communication in a multilevel, multiunit system.
- Response to pressures from outside the school system.
- Multiple and competing goals.
- The need to change.

Second, we assumed that each school district deals with these problems in characteristic ways that define their state as an adaptive system. Third, we posited that the characteristic behavior, or stable states, of school districts can be categorized by one of two ideal types: maintenance or development.

This report presents case materials that explore the plausibility of these assumptions and identifies organizational patterns and factors in the institutional setting that characterize maintenance and development. Maintenance and development are, of course, ideal types that do not fully or exactly capture the realities of school district life. Nonetheless, we see underlying organizational patterns in these stable states that define limits as well as possibilities for successfully implementing and sustaining planned change efforts in local school systems.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Marc Tucker of NIE and Elisabeth Hansot, our former NIE project monitor, encouraged us to look at school district behavior with a wide lens. They supported us in abandoning hypotheses and formal change models and turning instead to school district staff to find out what promotes or constrains local efforts to bring about change. Without their help, and the assistance of Fritz Mulhouser, our present NIE monitor, this exploratory venture would not have been made.

These NIE colleagues, and our reviewers David Cohen of Harvard University and Richard Elmore of the University of Washington, made useful and penetrating comments on earlier drafts of this manuscript. Their suggestions substantially improved this report. However, we were unable to treat many of the pertinent issues they raised, either because of time and space constraints or, more often, because our own understanding of school district behavior is still incomplete.

We owe an enormous debt to the personnel in the five school districts we visited. With impressive forbearance and good humor they gave freely of their time and knowledge. This study could not have been done without their assistance. We apologize if we have distorted the complex reality of their school districts for the sake of theoretical simplification.

All of these helpful people made the study possible and improved the result. Responsibility for any shortcomings that may remain, of course, rests with the authors.

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I. INTRODUCTION

During the 1960s and early 1970s "innovativeness" became the indispensable sign of the upwardly mobile educator and the self-respecting school district. No sooner had an innovation received national publicity than it was adopted by scores of school systems throughout the nation. Yet, according to the findings of many evaluations (e.g., Westinghouse Learning Corporation, 1969; Goodlad and Klein, 1971; Ford Foundation, 1972; Wargo et al., 1972), the innovations adopted during the Education Decade have generally failed to make consistent changes in educational practices or improve student performance significantly.

Recent research studies have begun to uncover the reasons for the disappointing results of innovations.[1] For example, research conducted at Rand from 1973 to 1977 (Berman and McLaughlin, 1977) traced the history and outcome of local educational innovations in almost 300 school systems and found that an innovation's characteristics do not accurately forecast its success or failure. What matters most is not what comes *in* to a school district, but what the district does with it. Schools and school districts generally have been either unwilling or unable to take all the steps necessary to effective innovation; they have not mobilized administrative support and staff commitment; they have not chosen and put into operation appropriate adaptive strategies; and they have not made the organizational changes required to sustain significant innovations. Consequently, innovations often are carried out pro forma and change superficial school practices but do not alter educational processes that affect student learning.[2]

These findings are disturbing, particularly in light of the apparent "success" school systems have achieved as stable social institutions. As Meyer (1977) observes, school districts regularly receive substantial local, state, and federal funding; they support personnel, design educational programs, operate physical plants, and deliver educational services on a predictable basis; they are given fairly high marks by parents in most opinion surveys; and despite temporary strikes and periodic financial crises, they hardly ever close their doors.

We know that school districts adopt many innovations, often carry them out superficially, and seldom improve their educational performance. However, this behavior does not seem to threaten their success as stable social institutions. This state of affairs suggests a distressing hypothesis: The very adoption of innovations may reinforce the stability of school districts, even though school performance may be unchanged or declining relative to students' needs.

In other words, it appears that the mere adoption of even ephemeral or ancillary innovations is a form of behavior by which districts adapt to external and internal pressures. Yet neither these pressures nor the school system's organizational beliefs and practices typically seem to force districts to follow through and produce significant change in the educational process. The pressures instead seem to subside with the act of adoption followed by the appearance of implementation.

[1] Fullan and Pomfret (1977) provide an excellent review of the literature.

[2] These findings are consistent with the conclusions reached by educational researchers who have examined innovations. See Smith and Keith (1971); Gross, Giacquinta, and Bernstein (1971); Bentzen and Tye (1973); Bentzen (1974); and House (1974).

Consequently, this behavior, which we call *adaptation without educational improvement*, takes the heat off and by so doing maintains the organizational status quo.

Adaptation without educational improvement seems to be a longstanding tendency in most school districts. For example, Mort and Cornell (1941), Gage (1963), and Stephens (1967) marshal evidence from earlier years (including innovations begun as long ago as 1897) implying that educational innovations seldom altered basic teaching practices. Of course, change has occurred in schooling over the years, but the *rate* of change in fundamental educational processes has been glacial, despite outward appearances of progress. This slowness to change has protected the educational system from being overwhelmed by transitory ideas and momentary fads; however, a riskier approach seems necessary to cope with the complex problems brought on by the rapid social changes and information explosion since World War II.

The recent history of the educational system's adjustments to changing external conditions does not bode well for its capacity to accomplish basic reform. Many school districts responded to the 1950s period of student enrollment increase by adding more programs, more facilities, and more staff; notwithstanding the new look in schools brought about by this expansion, the teacher's role with regard to students, parents, other teachers, and principals remained unchanged. Likewise, the current era of student enrollment decline, financial pressures, and mandated desegregation seems to call for far-reaching reforms in such school district activities as comprehensive planning, community outreach, and staff development. Yet many school systems are making only marginal changes and issuing symbolic pronouncements designed to relieve the pressure, not solve the problems.

Whether the impulse for change represents opportunity or threat, and whether it comes from educational innovations or new external conditions, the result is similar: Most school districts tend to adapt by altering their form while maintaining the status quo in their core beliefs and behavior patterns. How can this phenomenon be explained?

This report presents the results of exploratory research designed to shed light on the way school districts adapt to external and internal pressures for change. The research consisted of field work in five school districts over a two-year period. We selected these districts because they had reputations for being unusually innovative. In examining their operations, we found not only the expected patterns of adaptation but two other distinct patterns as well.

Two of the five districts responded to their problems in ways that could be called adaptation without educational improvement—that is, they altered management practices, adopted educational technologies, and so on, but they did not significantly change core organizational beliefs and structures that affect student learning. This form of adaptive behavior seemed to reflect and reinforce the stability of the school district organization. Because it served to maintain the status quo of core educational processes, we say that a school district characterized by this behavior is in a state of *maintenance*.

Another district responded to local pressures very differently. This district's community is polarized along ideological lines, and the resulting split has politicized the school system and imposed new priorities on its educational program. Consequently, the long-term effectiveness of educational delivery is in jeopardy. In short, this district offers an example of potential organizational *decay*.

The remaining two school districts seemed to have broken the usual mold of maintenance without jeopardizing their long-run effectiveness: They have begun to adapt to their particular pressures so as to consistently implement and sustain profound changes that may improve educational performance. The key to this adaptive behavior lies in organizational beliefs and structures that allow the school districts to routinely reexamine and renew some elements of their core educational processes. Both districts had been maintenance systems, but their present form of adaptive behavior did not evolve naturally or easily from maintenance. They developed into their present state, which appears quite stable for at least one of the districts, as the result of deliberate efforts. We call their state of adaptive behavior organizational *development*.

With these apparently different forms of school district behavior in mind, the research aimed to identify the school district characteristics—i.e., organizational beliefs and structures—that seem to explain maintenance, development, and decay. In particular, we examined three questions:

- How can the state of maintenance and development be characterized?
- What are the organizational dynamics, beliefs, and structures that keep each state stable and self-sustaining?
- How can school districts pass from maintenance to development without severely eroding their educational performance in the process?

The research and analysis used to examine these questions was guided by a theoretical framework about school district behavior, discussed in the next section.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research followed a three-step procedure. First, using a theoretical approach, we postulated organizational dynamics that may be central to school district adaptation. Second, guided by these concepts, we observed the way five school districts adapted to a wide variety of innovations, internal problems, and external interventions. Third, drawing on our field observations, we formulated more specific propositions that help explain different types of adaptation.

The fieldwork sample consisted of five moderate to large size urban school districts. The sample selection, data collection, and interpretation strategies all reflected our exploratory purpose, rather than the tenets of experimental or quasi-experimental design. For example, in selecting the sample, we picked reputedly "innovative" districts and avoided sites where little of even symbolic importance was going on. Consequently, our sample was not statistically representative but included districts that were actively involved in change efforts. Similarly, although the data collection was guided by a theoretical framework, we did not follow a standardized interview schedule but asked a series of broad questions that allowed us to pursue themes and events important to a particular district. Further, because our primary interest lay in theory building, we used our data selectively, so many interesting themes and observations contained in our case data are not discussed in this report.

Sample Selection

Candidate districts for the study were identified by reputation. To supplement our own knowledge about the "innovativeness" of particular school districts throughout the country, we solicited recommendations from a number of knowledgeable sources—researchers, state department of education officials, federal education program staff. From these nominations, we selected five moderate to large size districts. We deliberately excluded both small and huge districts from consideration because we expected that their institutional operations would vary in important respects from the organizational arrangements of the more typical urban school system.

Once the candidates were identified, district willingness to participate in our study played an important part in site selection. Because the study questions concerned such sensitive areas as organizational politics, we believed our data collection efforts would be fruitful only if district officials were willing to cooperate with us and to be candid. After an initial letter of introduction, we telephoned the district superintendents (or their representatives) to explain the objectives of our study more fully and to determine district receptivity to genuine involvement in the research.[3]

The resulting sample, then, is composed of districts that share a reputation as innovative and an expressed willingness to take part in the study. Although the districts are located in different sections of the country, they were not selected to be "representative" in size, ethnic makeup, or location.

Data Collection

Field research in each site was conducted by a two person Rand team, which spent approximately seven person-weeks at each site over a ten month period. Before the fieldwork, we held a number of staff meetings during which we developed a conceptual framework to guide our open-ended interviews. The framework and the resulting lines of inquiry were reviewed and revised in "debriefing" sessions following each field visit.

Interviews in the district began with central office staff. From these interviews, we identified additional respondents as well as school or project sites. By the completion of the fieldwork, we had interviewed respondents from all areas of school and community life—district administrators, principals, teachers, parents, school board members, newspaper reporters, members of special interest groups, and community leaders. We also attended school board meetings, meetings of the superintendent's cabinet, middle-management meetings, and teacher meetings. We frequently observed classroom practices in a representative sample of district schools.

In addition to these interviews and observations, we collected record data in each district—district and special project evaluations, district budgets, handbooks of district operations, newspaper clippings, speeches or articles by district staff, project proposals, school board minutes, special consultant reports, and management plans.

[3] One district, originally selected, was dropped after this followup telephone call; although they agreed to take part in the study, we were not confident that district officials would feel free to answer our questions fully and openly.

We guaranteed confidentiality to all respondents and agreed that the identity of school districts would be anonymous in all published work. To honor this agreement, we have changed a number of facts and figures in the case studies presented (e.g., project and district names, enrollment figures, location, and so on). None of these changes affects the inferences that have been drawn from the data.

CONTENTS OF THE REPORT

Section II discusses theoretical concepts about school district adaptation. Sections III to VI present case materials designed to explore the organizational patterns of school districts that have adapted to their situations in various ways.[4] We hesitate to call these descriptions case studies; the empirical material to be described for each district was chosen to illustrate theoretical themes, not to provide ethnographic analyses. We felt that it was premature to be either testing hypotheses or conducting intensive field investigations before richer conceptualizations were formulated. The last section describes the characteristics of a maintenance school system and compares it with a developmental one. Although these descriptions must be considered as tentative hypotheses, we believe they are a step toward the distant goal of understanding school district behavior.

[4] The case materials for one of the five school districts is not presented in this report because we felt that we could not disguise the district's identity and still tell the story of the district's change activities.

II. A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

When we began this study, we searched the literature for an approach to understanding school district behavior that would help structure the research, but no single approach provided as comprehensive a treatment as seemed necessary. Therefore, we combined elements from two rather broad social science models—the theories of institutional development and the concepts of adaptive systems. The resulting synthesis constitutes our "theoretical framework."

The term "theoretical framework" implies a greater degree of definitiveness and completeness than is justified at this point. Despite its tentativeness, however, the scheme presented in this section allowed us to conduct empirical observations in a systematic fashion.

THE FRAMEWORK'S INTELLECTUAL ROOTS

Sociologists have long been concerned with characterizing social and cultural change, particularly the progress of one form of society to a more "advanced" form. To do so, Western social philosophy has evolved a tradition of dichotomous schemes in which older, less "developed" societies are compared with modern, more "developed" states. Despite many problems in directly applying these theoretical concepts to school district change, some sociological notions of institutional development seem quite relevant.[1] First, the idea of development as progress from one stable set of institutional relationships to another provides a useful metaphor for our sense that school districts can develop their organizations to a more advanced state. Second, the idea that the traditional form of society has internal mechanisms that work against its development parallels the school district phenomenon that we call maintenance. Third, the idea of pattern variables as a way to describe the main cultural and social patterns of one state compared with another suggests a scheme for distinguishing between school district maintenance and school district development. Specifically, the pattern variables refer to a series of "dilemmas" that social systems face; Parsons and Shills (1951) contend that the institutional development of societies can be compared in terms of the way they resolve these dilemmas. Similarly, we will define dilemmas that confront school districts and hypothesize that a school district's choices about them characterize its adaptive patterns. We use these adaptive patterns to explore maintenance and development in the school district context.

Although drawing an analogy between school district change and the development of social institutions offers many advantages, the sociological models have at

[1] For example, Henry Maine advanced the notion of a *status* versus a *contract* type of society; Ferdinand Toennies saw societies as progressing from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft*; Emile Durkheim suggested the two forms of *mechanical* or *organic solidarity*; and Max Weber formulated and elaborated on the *traditional society* versus the *rational-legal system*. For a description and comparison of these approaches, see Pye (1962, ch. 3). For a review of theories of social change, see Applebaum (1970). A branch of present-day sociology, as represented in the work of Parsons (1951), has used Weber's concepts as a starting point to postulate key "pattern variables" or modes of behavior that underlie the traditional versus the modern form of society.

least three shortcomings: They so heavily emphasize "equilibrium" conditions that keep society stable that they neglect the dynamics of change; their emphasis on development as progress precludes analysis of decay; and the macro-level of the models means that micro-level interactions among people and organizations are sketchy.[2] To compensate for these deficiencies, we turned to the literature on organizations as adaptive social systems.

Social scientists and philosophers also have long drawn crude analogies between biological or mechanical systems and social institutions. More recently, however, the advent of computers together with a deeper understanding of organisms has led to the development of sophisticated systems models. The newer notions of system functioning, as evidenced in the pioneering work of Weiner (1954), Bertalanffy (1952), Ashby (1960 and 1963), and others, point toward a general theory of systems that can be applied to the description of social organizations, as well as complex machines and individual behavior. Indeed, these theoretical concepts—called adaptive systems, general systems, or cybernetic theory—are beginning to be used by sociologists (Buckley, 1967), political scientists (Deutsch, 1963), decision-making theorists (Simon and Newell, 1972; Steinbruner, 1974), and organization theorists (Katz and Kahn, 1966).

The adaptive systems approach provides concepts for studying *complex organizations* that are *open to their environment* and have the capacity to *change while maintaining their basic systemic properties.*[3] The italicized items are among the main attributes of school districts, as well as other social systems. For these reasons, several educational researchers have explicitly framed their work in terms of an adaptive systems approach, although they concentrate on somewhat different aspects of school district behavior.

One approach, represented by the work of Miles (1965), uses systems terminology to characterize how the social psychology of the school district's organization relates to its educational delivery.[4] Miles is particularly concerned with examining "informal" patterns of behavior, especially cultural patterns (as revealed in beliefs, norms, and roles of the staff)[5] and communication patterns (as evidenced by, for example, interactions among staff, feedback relationships, and signs of organizational learning).[6] In this view, change requires alterations in the patterns of human

[2] For criticisms of the developmental model outlined above, see Rostow (1953), Pye (1962), and Huntington (1971). For alternative models of growth and development from an organizational view, see Haire (1959) and Starbuck (1965).

[3] As far as possible, we spare the reader the necessity of confronting formal definitions of system terms for two reasons. First, this exploratory study has the purpose of raising critical questions about school district behavior as a precursor to an elaborated theory. Second, formal definitions can be found in the cited references. It would be remiss, however, to avoid defining an adaptive system, which in the words of Miles (1964, p. 13) is

> a bounded collection of interdependent parts, devoted to the accomplishment of some goal or goals, with the parts maintained in a steady state in relation to each other, and the environment by means of (1) standard modes of operation, and (2) feedback from the environment about the consequences of system actions.

For similar definitions, see Hall and Fagen, 1956; Miller, 1965; Bertalanffy, 1962; Katz and Kahn, 1966.

[4] The social psychological approach to organizational analysis includes the work of Katz and Kahn, 1966; Argyris, 1964; Bennis, 1969; and Bennis, Benne, and Chin, 1969. In educational research, a main branch of this approach is called "organizational development" (OD); see Schmuck and Miles, 1971, for OD's assumptions.

[5] Sarason (1971) makes a major contribution to understanding the importance of the school's cultural patterns. Also see Argyris, 1974; Gross et al., 1971; Deal et al., 1975 for a variety of different approaches.

[6] The social psychological literature emphasizes communication patterns, as Hawley (1974) discusses. Also see Kaufman (1973) for a different perspective on organizational feedback.

interactions that define the school system, and the target of change efforts ought to be the "improvements of organizational health—the school system's ability not only to function effectively, but to develop and grow into a more fully functioning system." (Miles, 1965, p. 12.)

Without rejecting the value of a social psychological approach, Baldridge (1972) takes a systems view to emphasize a different level of analysis and different processes of organizational change. He focuses on the formal administrative structure of school district organization, particularly its authority structure and decision-making patterns of the top school district management,[7] and argues for more concentrated research on the political processes of interest group bargaining and coalition formation.[8] In this view, change is brought about by the political strategies of school district leadership.

Although Baldridge also calls for the "external environment" of school districts to be a major research focus, it remains for the work of such researchers as Dalin (1973) to attempt to systematically incorporate the interactions of school districts with larger social, political, and historical forces. This research, very much in the European political-sociological tradition, sees system change as resulting from the way conflicts in the community and in the national society are played out in the local school district itself.[9]

We drew on these variations to find a framework for analyzing school district adaptation. In particular, we felt that analysis should be concerned with how the cultural and behavioral patterns within the organization affect its performance, how the administrative structure and the political decisions and strategies of district leaders affect the capacity of the district to change, and how interactions with the environment shape and limit the possibilities of change. Moreover, we used systems theory to conceptualize the basic functioning of school district operations and the dynamics of school district change. The amalgam of these systems concepts and those from the sociological approach to institutional development constitute the basic elements of this study's theoretical framework.

THE DILEMMAS OF SCHOOL DISTRICT ADAPTATION

Our theoretical approach rests on three assumptions about American public school systems. First, we assume that a functioning school district must (1) deliver educational and other social services, (2) integrate the complex parts of its organization, (3) interact with its environment, (4) set and seek goals for the above tasks, and (5) perform all of the above tasks regularly and predictably. For the sake of

[7] Many educational researchers have contributed to an understanding of the administrative structure of school districts. See, for example, Griffiths, 1964; Bidwell 1965; and Anderson, 1968. Several researchers have examined the role of the superintendent (e.g., Carlson, 1972), but only a few have closely examined decisionmaking processes (see Cohen and March, 1974; Wiener, 1976; and Pauly, 1977).

[8] Cyert and March (1963) offer theoretical concepts for studying coalition formation in organizations. Few educational researchers have followed this lead, but a number of studies have done empirical research on interactions with the community (e.g., Minor, 1966; Herriott and Hodgkins, 1969) or on the politics of school boards and of local, state, and federal governmental relationships (e.g., Carlson, 1964; Zeigler et al., 1973; Kirst, 1972; Iannaccone, 1967; Masters et al., 1964).

[9] See Dahrendorf, 1958. American social scientists have not paid much attention to larger system forces affecting school systems. Some exceptions are Greiner, 1967; Wayland, 1964; Callahan, 1962; and Wirt and Kirst, 1972; House, 1974; Schon, 1971.

simplification, we call the first three the delivery, bureaucratic, and political tasks.[10]

Second, in performing these tasks, we assume that school district staff are faced with a continuous and often unpredictable stream of choices (March and Olsen, 1976). Our definition of adaptive behavior is the actions taken to deal with choices. Despite the differences among school districts, all American public schools face similar choice situations (e.g., curriculum decisions) and similar constraints on school district adaptation (e.g., the need to comply with state regulations). As we will discuss shortly, this similarity arises from the nature of the educational delivery task, the legal and social status of school districts as public institutions, and the historical evolution of the administrative structure of public schools in the United States.[11] Because the choices and the constraints are common, school districts look and act alike. In short, school districts define a genus in the family of public social service delivery systems.

Third, we assume school districts have some latitude in how they adapt to situations arising from their tasks, but they face inherent dilemmas in doing so. For example, no matter how a district deals with a problem involving its relationship with the community, its choices have implications for the status of the "boundary" between the school district and the community: If its choices open the system to community influences, the district may lose its professional autonomy; if its choices close the system from public inspection, the district may lose its political and financial support. This type of dilemma is embedded in all the district's interactions with its environment. Similarly, dilemmas arise for each school district task.

The primary delivery task, teaching, consists of a transaction between teacher and student. Although student learning is the object of teaching, the transactional process requires what Thompson (1967, p. 17) calls the "intensive" use of pedagogic techniques whose "selection, combination, and order of application are determined by feedback from the [student]."[12] This labor-intensive process implies a dilemma for school district operations. To teach effectively, the teacher needs to develop heuristics that reflect the teacher's ability and interests, the classroom situation, and the students' ability and interests. As Hawley (1975) observes, many practitioners and educational researchers believe that school systems should encourage each teacher to fully develop a unique heuristic style. Yet promoting and allowing teachers pedagogic individuality raises questions for efficient school operation—e.g., can all the students be served equally without constraints on teachers? Can the quality of teaching be maintained across teachers? Can standards and performance objectives demanded by society or required by law be met? There are no pat answers to these questions. Nonetheless, in the choices they make, functioning

[10] Parsons (1960) suggests that all organizations have three levels of functioning-technical, managerial, and institutional. Thompson (1967) uses this division as a starting point for his theoretical approach to organizational analysis. Other organization theorists—e.g., Udy (1965)—use more levels of functioning. In educational research, Elboim-Dror (1973) uses a division that is similar to ours—namely, the implementation, policy formation, and management or control subsystems. We will not detail the formal structure of the school district's organization. For details, see Elboim-Dror (1973) and Bidwell (1965).

[11] We will not detail the general properties of American public schools—e.g., local public control, compulsory education, and the classroom-in-the-school mode of instruction. See Miles (1967) for an excellent review of these properties.

[12] Thompson (1967) suggests that organizations, like school systems that have an intensive technology, have characteristic ways of managing themselves and interacting with their environment. Meyer (1977) and others have examined this hypothesis in the school district context. For the relationship of technology to operations, see Burns and Stalker, 1961; Haige and Aiken, 1969; Hickson and Pugh, 1969.

school districts strike a balance between encouraging *diversity* in delivery and seeking *uniformity*.

A related dilemma arises from the administrative need to integrate the complex structure of American public school systems. Because of historical evolution, districts are organized as *loosely coupled systems* (March and Olsen, 1976; Weick, 1976)—that is, the various units of school districts (classrooms, schools, management units) function more or less independently of one another so that what happens in one school, for example, may not affect the operations of another school. Loose coupling has both advantages and disadvantages for the regular functioning of school districts, as Weick (1976) observes. For example, the more autonomous a school is from other schools or from district management, the easier might be its adaptation to local neighborhood conditions. Yet this autonomy might prevent such a district-wide policy as desegregation. How should loose coupling be handled? How should organizational units be integrated to serve common purposes? Should there be a high degree of centralization or a high degree of decentralization? Once again, there are no easy answers: We call this systemic dilemma *centralization versus decentralization*.

School districts are profoundly political systems because they cannot function without the financial, political, and social support of parents, community members, and local, state, and federal governments (Wirt and Kirst, 1972). This dependency, together with American political traditions, implies that school districts must respond to demands from their environment—e.g., new government regulations and policies, trends in economic and social conditions, and requests from parents and local interest groups. School systems are, in a word, open to their environment. This openness has many implications for school district functioning,[13] including a systemic dilemma: How can a district protect itself from external political control or from endless conflicting demands that cannot be met, while being responsive and accountable to legitimate forces? How can educators retain their professional status and still accept advice and direction from the public? We call this dilemma *openness versus closedness*.

A fourth dilemma arises because school districts set and seek multiple goals in relationship to each of the three tasks—delivery, bureaucratic, and political. Goals in one area inevitably conflict with goals in the other areas, in part because of the difficulties of measuring educational output,[14] the loose coupling of the system, and the often incompatible demands placed on the school district by its multiple constituencies. School districts often deal with these conflicts by articulating formal goals that smooth over differences but have little to do with the district's agenda.[15] When one examines operative goals as revealed by their adaptive behavior, school districts tend to give priority to some objectives over others. By so doing, they make an implicit choice about the dilemma we call *delivery goals versus nondelivery goals*.

[13] Although the organizational literature generally has neglected studying the effects of the environment on organizations, some recent studies have begun to conceptualize what these effects might be. See Emery and Trist, 1965; Evan, 1966; Lawrence and Lorsch, 1969; Terreberry, 1968; Jurkovich, 1974.

[14] Educational outputs are extraordinarily difficult to measure, and many observers have commented on how this difficulty affects school operation and particularly the setting and seeking of goals (Miles, 1967; Anderson, 1968; Pincus, 1974; Hawley, 1975). Measurement difficulties in the delivery domain can exacerbate potential conflicts between delivery goals and political or bureaucratic goals.

[15] Organization theorists often distinguish between formal and "operative" goals. See Perrow, 1961; and Hall, 1972.

We assume that insofar as its various tasks are not performed in a regular and predictable manner, the system will begin to decay—the school district's ability to satisfy delivery, bureaucratic, and political goals will erode, as will its support from the environment and its integration of the staff. Stability is an essential ingredient of a functioning system. But so is the ability to evolve new operating procedures in response to changes in the environment (e.g., new technical knowledge, changed cultural and social values, demographic shifts, and different student populations). Without the ability to change, school systems also would decay; their educational performance and their support from the community would eventually decline and so would the cohesiveness of the staff. Thus, as many educational researchers have observed (e.g., Goodlad, 1975), *stability versus change* presents a fundamental dilemma for school district operations.

Our earlier discussion of adaptation suggested that many school districts change only superficial aspects of their practices, while core delivery processes remain the same. However, the dilemma can be handled another way: The school district can change some core processes and develop a new state of stability to incorporate this change into the organization.

We propose that school districts must constantly handle five related dilemmas:

- Diversity versus uniformity in delivery (the diversity dilemma).
- Centralization versus decentralization of the school district's loose coupling (the integration dilemma).
- Openness versus closedness of the system to external influences (the boundary dilemma).
- Delivery goals versus nondelivery goals (the multiple goal dilemma).
- Stability versus change (the change dilemma).

MAINTENANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

The way a school district adapts generally reflects its organizational culture and structure as well as its environmental setting. Because most of the time, most school districts have regular and predictable organizational patterns and a reasonably placid environment (Emery and Trist, 1965), we suspect that their adaptive behavior is also regular and predictable.

We hypothesize that school districts can be classified according to their characteristic mode of adaptive behavior. Moreover, we believe that they can belong to (1) one of two stable states, which we call *maintenance* or *development*, or (2) transition states including *decay*. The term *state* refers to the district's organizational patterns together with its characteristic mode of adaptation.

Our empirical research aimed to identify organizational patterns and adaptive behavior that characterize school district maintenance and development, as well as transitional states. We particularly tried to understand the dynamic mechanisms underlying these states. Two key system concepts guided our explorations.

The first, morphostasis, refers to the tendency of systems to retain their core internal arrangements, despite changes in external conditions (Buckley, 1967, p. 58). This concept provides a model for the dynamic of maintenance. The familiar household thermostat is a simple case in point; it reacts to alterations in its environment's temperature so as to maintain a steady-state temperature. The key dynamic

is a conserving (or negative) feedback: The system's performance affects the input to the system, which causes the system to make internal adjustments to alter its performance. In the morphostatic situation, these adjustments seek to maintain the system's basic internal arrangements.

Analogously, school districts typically adapt to changing outside conditions and pressures by altering organizational procedures in ways that attempt to maintain community support and reduce external demands for district change. Thus, there is a continual and rapid modification in the appearance of schooling. Nonetheless, we assume that most organizational alterations in the maintenance system do not significantly change basic teaching practices. Consequently, change in educational performance comes about glacially at best.

Although morphostasis is a useful concept for understanding school district maintenance, it does not tell us what organizational characteristics cause maintenance. Nor does it identify district patterns that prevent school systems from reorganizing themselves to produce more significant change. Our case materials will explore both areas.

A second system concept, morphogenesis, refers to processes whereby systems change their basic internal arrangements and develop new steady-state conditions. This concept suggests a model for the dynamic of development. Biological evolution and human learning are examples of morphogenesis. The key dynamic is a positive (or deviation-amplifying) feedback (Maruyama, 1963): Rather than restoring the status quo, the system reacts to deviations from its usual behavior by changing its internal arrangements. The new arrangements tend to incorporate the deviation in a part of the system.[16]

In the school district context, we are concerned with morphogenetic processes that describe how school systems can adapt so that changes in core educational processes can lead to educational improvement. The critical point for development is that such processes need to be *institutionalized* (incorporated into the district's standard operating procedures). Educational researchers use such expressions as self-renewal (Gardner, 1963) to connote this critical organizational dynamic. For example, according to Miles and Lake (1967, p. 82), a self-renewing school district has

> the ability to *continuously* sense and adapt to its external and internal environment in such a manner as to strengthen itself and ultimately fulfill its goal of providing education for children. (Emphasis added.)

We believe that "the ability to continuously adapt" so as "to strengthen itself" requires that a school organization institutionalize its change processes. The case materials will describe change activities in two school districts that seem to have developed a self-renewing capability. By examining the organizational patterns underlying these change efforts, we hope to identify organizational factors that explain how the change processes are institutionalized.

[16] Morphogenesis can lead to either growth or decline in terms of system performance. Some forms of mental illness and housing market decline are examples of positive feedback processes that incorporate deviations that tend to destroy the system with respect to the attainment of system goals. In exploring school district decay, we will look for signs of morphogenetic processes leading to a disintegration of the school district's organization.

SUMMARY

We have drawn on two literatures—sociological inquiry into the institutional development of societies and general systems models for explaining adaptive behavior—to construct a conceptual framework for the analysis of school district adaptation. The concepts of school district dilemmas and of different system states gave us an image of maintenance and development and of the dynamics that distinguish these states. This image guided our fieldwork, but it portrays ideals, not complex operating school districts. The empirical research aimed to elaborate and go beyond these abstract notions.

III. THE ILLUSION OF CHANGE

Curriculum reform and individualization captured the educational fashion market of the middle and late 1960s. Midville School District, a medium-size school system serving a fairly homogeneous urbanized community in an agricultural center, followed the national trend in 1968 by adopting Project Today. The project, an innovative reading program, featured an array of modern pedagogic techniques —continuous progress learning, diagnostic and prescriptive procedures, and behavioral objectives keyed to state-adopted textbooks. By 1971, reading scores in Project Today's two schools, which were Title I schools, had increased somewhat. Based on this success and the project's apparent potential for low-cost dissemination, Midville's central administration recommended to the school board that Project Today be spread to all district schools.

Project Today now forms the major program of a district organizational unit, called the Curriculum Assistance Division (CAD), which was developed to provide teacher services and to carry out educational innovations. According to a CAD survey, Project Today is being effectively implemented throughout the district. Moreover, Midville School District has packaged the project for export to other school systems. The administrator currently in charge of the program reports that Project Today has been widely adopted throughout the state and even in some neighboring states.

Despite these glowing reports, Project Today's educational success is an illusion. Our visits to numerous classrooms in a dozen schools revealed no more than sporadic use of project materials and methods.[1] Some teachers used project materials for their own teaching purposes, but we saw no instances in which Project Today resulted in significant behavioral change in teaching or sustained improvement in student performance.

This section examines the activities and attitudes of various actors in the Midville School District as they went about the prosaic business of carrying out Project Today. We will illustrate how the reality of an educational innovation can be far different from its claims of success, even when those claims are based on the sincere perceptions of district staff. More important, we will use the example of Project Today to explore basic questions: What organizational patterns of the Midville School District created and perpetuated an illusion of change? Why did the energies and talents of dedicated people come to little more than "running to stay in place"?

We will then turn to a reorganization effort and a desegregation plan undertaken by Midville School District. These reform opportunities produced no more significant or lasting change than Project Today. We will see that the organizational patterns predisposing Project Today to be superficial also prevented the effective execution of more ambitious reform.

[1] We also gathered systematic survey data about Project Today because the project was in the sample of approximately 300 innovations analyzed by Rand's Change Agent Study. Teachers and principals from four schools were interviewed in 1974 or in 1976. For details of the surveys, see Berman and Pauly (1975) and Berman and McLaughlin (1977). The results of the survey agreed with the information gathered by classroom visits.

INSTITUTIONALIZING SYMBOLIC CHANGE

Project Today began in 1968 as the brainchild of Midville's prime change agent, Dr. John Greer. Greer, then Elementary School Division Head, was the one Midville administrator who followed the educational literature and traveled extensively outside the district.[2] He interested two outstanding principals in the idea of continuous progress learning and encouraged them to write a proposal for an ESEA, Title III grant. They did, a three-year grant was awarded, and the district left the two principals alone to try out the ideas and project materials for the period of federal funding.

Rather than tracing the project's history, we will begin our analysis by taking a snapshot of the project's state in 1975, three years after the end of the federal grant. At this time, Project Today is the official district-wide reading program. We will first describe the extent of the project's use at three elementary schools—Washington, a nontraditional, consistently innovative school; Sewall, an average school in terms of educational program and innovativeness; and Wilder, a traditional school.[3]

The principal of Washington Elementary, the most innovative school in the district, is one of the two principals who originated Project Today. He started the project to deal with reading problems of minority children in his previous Title I school, but his new school—Washington Elementary—had a very different atmosphere, and the principal had a different agenda.

Washington Elementary services an affluent middle class and university community and has an air of activity and excitement: The principal takes an active role in curriculum issues, teachers are dedicated, and students appear industrious and happy. When asked about the school's use of Project Today, the principal said flatly, "We don't use it." Although the project had enabled him to learn a great deal about individualization, Project Today's methods and materials were now "obsolete." He had developed a reading program geared to the capabilities of students in Washington Elementary, and he felt this program was far superior to Project Today. When questioned about the district's mandated use of Project Today, the principal responded, "They can't touch me because our reading scores are the best in the district. Besides, they [the administrators in the central office] don't know what's going on."

Washington Elementary makes no claims to have used Project Today. The principal and staff have developed their own educational program in isolation from other schools and without support or interference from the central office or the Curriculum Assistance Division. Being in an affluent and politically influential neighborhood, Washington Elementary is regarded as exceptional and treated as an exception. The principal need not challenge the district's policy to do his "own

[2] The district generally hires local people and few of the staff or central administration have experience elsewhere. Carlson (1972) suggests that parochial versus cosmopolitan backgrounds explain differences in school superintendents' behavior. We suspect that parochialism is reflected in Midville's conservative patterns.

[3] We asked about 20 respondents—district administrators, teachers, school board members, parents, and outside experts—to categorize Midville's schools for several characteristics, including the school's program and its reputation for being innovative. Based on these subjective reports as well as our observations, we guess that about 10 percent of the elementary schools were nontraditional and consistently innovative (over a period of five years), 15-30 percent were traditional, and the remainder were middle of the road in regard to their educational programs and the extent to which they tried new approaches. One of each type of this rough classification is represented in the above discussion.

thing"; he has a power base in the community that would protect him and his program were central officials to press for genuine implementation of Project Today.

Sewall Elementary, serving a highly mobile, white-collar community, is more typical of schools in Midville. Project Today's materials and instructions are displayed on the bookshelves in the principal's office. Some teachers, aided by a reading specialist from CAD, use project materials. In addition, each teacher is required by the district mandate to state behavioral objectives for students. Project Today's guidelines are used for this purpose, but most teachers simply feel that the project's methods are no different from what any good teacher does. The principal told us, at the beginning of our two-hour visit, that the project was "moving right along." Later, while proudly guiding us around the well-maintained school grounds to exhibit the success of a student-run "No Litter" campaign, he confided that teachers could do what they wanted in the "instructional area." He added, with a half-wink, "As long as they [the central office] get all the forms filled out, they don't bother you."

Sewall Elementary thus uses Project Today in a pro forma fashion: form-filing and procedure following. The principal executed his administrative duty by formally complying with bureaucratic necessities. The teachers accepted these "paper" requirements, for they know that neither the principal nor central administrators would check "behind the classroom door."

Wilder Elementary is one of two schools designated as Back-to-Basics Schools under a Board-sponsored initiative. Although the principal does not agree with the pedagogic thrust of Project Today, he enforces its use in the school because "the law is the law."[4] Despite the apparent contradiction between the traditional lecture format used by most teachers at Wilder and the individualized teaching techniques of Project Today, teachers draw on project materials (and the project's guides to state-adopted texts) to prepare their classes. Teachers at Wilder do not, however, follow the prescribed individualization procedures. Nonetheless, the Curriculum Assistance Division's survey of Project Today implementation indicates a high score for Wilder Elementary.

These glimpses of Project Today's fate at three very different schools suggest that this district-wide change effort resulted in minor alterations in some school or classroom procedures, but little significant or lasting change in teaching (or in school processes that affect the teacher's role).[5] The reasons are easy to identify: Teachers did not develop a sense of ownership in the project; and principals did not actively provide moral, technical, and political support.[6] The lack of these necessary ingredients for successful implementation stems more from the nature of

[4] This legalistic attitude—caring more for the letter than the spirit of the law—is widely held in Midville. It is implicit in the district's response to directives, be they issued by the local school board, the state, or by federal agencies.

[5] The response of teachers to the Change Agent survey supports this assumption, which is primarily based on the authors' visits to many district schools. (See Berman and McLaughlin, 1977, for aggregate results of the survey.) Some teachers from the two schools that originated the project reported a change in their teaching practices. However, several of them are no longer teaching—two were promoted to be specialists in CAD, two retired, and one has become an administrator. One of the school's principals transferred to Washington Elementary, the other became the Assistant Administrator of CAD. Their departure seriously eroded support for Project Today within the original schools. Despite the district's mandate, it appears that whatever change had occurred in these schools would be short-lived.

[6] Several empirical studies have demonstrated the significance of these factors for effective implementation. See Fullan and Pomfret (1977) for a review of the literature.

district policy than from the characteristics of the innovation. The district had mandated a uniform reading program for all elementary schools, even though conditions vary among schools and teachers differ within schools. The top-down and uniform nature of this district approach worked against the development of staff commitment for Project Today.

Understanding why Project Today, like most educational innovations undertaken in Midville, was not completely implemented is important, but it is only half the story. District officials claimed—and, to some extent believed—Project Today was successful. This discrepancy between the appearance of success and the reality of no significant change in the classroom is at the heart of school district maintenance. Staff at all levels of Midville's organization supported this phenomenon. We will show that their behavior had little to do with Project Today's educational merits but instead reflected organizational patterns at the school level, at the middle-management level, and at the central-office level.

The School Level: Insularity and Mistrust

Sarason (1971) suggests that schools have an organizational "culture" constraining teacher behavior, particularly with respect to interacting with other teachers and principals. The cultural pattern of the teacher's isolation behind the classroom door (Goodlad and Klein, 1974) seemed apparent in Sewall and in Wilder Elementary Schools as it also was in the vast majority of Midville's other schools. Indeed, Project Today's symbolic implementation both reflected and reinforced this deeper cultural pattern. Project teachers not only passively complied with official requirements without altering their classroom practices, but they recognized that such behavior was an accepted aspect of school life. For example, teachers knew that Midville's principals rarely violated the implicit taboo against entering classrooms for the purposes of evaluation. Principals seemed for the most part to feel helpless to penetrate the teachers' symbolic compliance. The following general observation of Sarason (1971, p. 120) about the principal's role also captures the essence of the principal's dilemma in Midville, especially in the average school represented by Sewall Elementary:

> There is little [the principal] feels he can do about what goes on in a classroom, particularly if the teacher has tenure or has been a teacher for a number of years. As a result, the principal tolerates situations that by his values or standards are "wrong." Because this toleration is frequently accompanied by feelings of guilt and inadequacy, it frequently has an additional consequence: the tendency to *deny that these situations exist in the school.* (Emphasis added.)

The typical principal in Midville also plays the symbolic game of compliance at another level—the school's relationship to the district. But in contrast to the largely unexpressed separation between principal and teacher, the schism between principals and central administrators is almost at the surface. For example, despite wide differences in capabilities and styles (after we had gained a measure of their confidence), Midville's principals articulated attitudes similar to those expressed by the principals of Washington and Sewall: "They [central administrators] don't know

what's going on"; "as long as they [the central office] get all the forms filled out, they don't bother you."[7]

Indeed, even the traditional principal at Wilder responded to our questions about assistance the district might be giving to his school by saying, "They are too busy fighting among themselves to pay attention to us. They don't care." Thus, principals feel isolated from central administrators, and their sense of isolation is based on fact, for the central office rarely penetrates into school operations. Principals have, in short, freedom not to take district directives very seriously.

Principals seldom ignore district wishes, however. On the contrary, they generally have the appearance of compliance because they fear repercussions to their careers or to their ability to advance their schools' educational programs. For example, many principals seemed to feel that overt noncompliance in Project Today was risky behavior. It would be interpreted as "fighting the system," which would jeopardize their jobs. If Midville's principals had in fact fought the system, we doubt whether the status quo could have been preserved. But they could cite few concrete examples of recalcitrant principals, so that their fear was based more on inferences drawn from Midville's organizational climate than on experience.[8] Notwithstanding the rarity of concrete instances of career damage, the perceived need to avoid risk and to cover one's personal and bureaucratic self-interest is pervasive; symbolic compliance is an ingrained organizational pattern.

Midville's atmosphere of an underlying mistrust of central administrators also affects the relationships among principals. For example, most principals confidentially view a new district policy for principal transfer as a sanction that could be applied arbitrarily against them. The process by which the transfer policy was established made them wary. Although a group of principals was convened to draw up policy guidelines, these principals felt they were co-opted by the central office. As one member of the group commented: "They asked us to draw up a list of priorities and guidelines that suited their purposes and called the policy 'ours'." Most principals feel threatened by the policy, yet they have been unable to band together to protest it. Instead, each principal seems all the more anxious to insulate himself from the administration and, by so doing, further separates himself from his peers.[9]

[7] Midville's staff typically used "they" without specifying the pronoun's referent. This speech pattern struck us as a sign of the alienation of the staff from the "system." Although some central administrators —e.g., John Greer—were liked and respected, the school-level staff tended to lump all officials together as "they" versus "we."

[8] We did uncover one instance of active noncompliance toward district policy. The case involved a vice principal of a junior high school who bitterly recalled how he unsuccessfully struggled against the termination of a highly regarded arts and music program (originally funded by Title III). "All they had to do was pay for a half-time equivalent, but Morgan didn't want it. He had to pay for repairing the cracks in his parking lots." (Morgan is the business manager of Midville. His full name is Dr. Ralph Morgan, but he is commonly referred to by his last name.) The vice principal believes he is now thought of as a "troublemaker" and feels he has been passed over for promotion.

[9] Another example of how the pervasive mistrust of "downtown" can affect the solidarity of principals involves a conflict stemming from the principals' need to be loyal to teachers on the one hand, and to show allegiance to the administration on the other hand. In forthcoming collective bargaining negotiations, principals must choose between becoming associated with the teachers' union or becoming grouped with the central administration. Central administrators, whose pay the board specifically refused to increase in the last salary period, are actively lobbying among the principals in the hope that administrators and principals can form a united front against the board. Principals wish to retain their hard-earned separate identities as administrators, yet they seem unwilling to trust their fate to the central office. At last report, they were debating whether they could get around their dilemma by strengthening their Principals' Association.

In summary, the school staff perpetuates the illusion of change for reasons that reflect Midville's organizational patterns. Teachers passively comply with official requirements without significantly changing their classroom practices. Such symbolic behavior is characteristic of the school's culture. The principals, who typically feel they cannot penetrate the classroom boundary, accept pro forma compliance from teachers; in some cases, the conflicting psychological demands of their role or bureaucratic and career concerns cause them to ignore evidence of no change. Moreover, most principals see it in their self-interest to protect themselves and their school from central administrators. They conform to official requirements, knowing that "going along" avoids trouble. Central officials, whose interests are perceived by the staff to be quite different from their own, signal the district's willingness to tolerate the staff's symbolic behavior by taking no steps to penetrate the school's boundary.

The Middle-Management Level: Perverse Incentives and Frustration

District-mandated curriculum projects such as Project Today cannot be effectively carried out in an atmosphere of school insularity and distrust toward district objectives. Yet Midville's central administrators, who should be sensitive to these issues, also participated in the game of symbolic compliance and allowed the illusion of change to persist. Why and in what ways did they do so?

Project Today could have been the responsibility of any of three organizational entities of Midville School District—the area superintendents, the Evaluation Division, or the Curriculum Assistance Division. If the project were to become an integrated aspect of the district's educational program, one might expect it to be administered in the direct line of authority of the area superintendents. Project Today was, in fact, not assigned to the area superintendents, which testifies to the peripheral place held by the project—Midville's showcase educational innovation—in the administration's priorities.[10] The Evaluation Division, which has staff rather than formal line authority, might have been given responsibility if a need for formative evaluation were perceived. But formative evaluation plays no role in district procedures—the requisite norms of trust and giving help for its own sake are lacking. The Evaluation Division's staff of highly competent specialists primarily conduct evaluations and testing required by federal and state agencies. Their work does not appear to be used in any district decision processes.

Thus, the "monitoring" of Project Today fell solely to the Curriculum Assistance Division. CAD is a specialized unit composed of library and computer services and of curriculum area specialists who are considered as teachers on special assignment. The administrator of CAD reports directly to the deputy superintendent and has the same formal authority as the area superintendents. In fact, CAD has little influence. Principals and teachers do not hold CAD in high regard as a source of new ideas or as a provider of needed services. About the curriculum specialists, one teacher said: "They don't come very often, and when they do, they're not much help." A principal remarked: "I've never seen one."

CAD's administrator, Bill Ducakis, is a bright, ambitious former principal who, according to board members, is thought of as a "Young Turk" and is being groomed

[10] The role of the area superintendents is discussed subsequently.

for an assistant superintendency. He has considerable knowledge and insight into how Project Today should be implemented. In particular, he does not believe the project can be carried out uniformly throughout the district. Yet Ducakis has not presented this view to the board. Were he to do so, he believes the board would not understand the complexities: "They want results, not excuses." He seems to believe that for want of an adequate explanation of Project Today's lack of success, the board would raise questions about CAD rather than the project. He does not want to risk such a confrontation, particularly because he is unsure of the support the superintendent and other central administrators might provide for CAD.

Ducakis would seem to have ample incentives to report success and avoid scrutiny. Such incentives perversely act to deter a serious evaluation of the project's implementation. Rather than undertaking an independent evaluation or personally visiting classrooms, Bill Ducakis has relied on and accepted questionable data—namely, the generally optimistic self-assessments of principals and the reports of his thinly spread and overworked staff of teachers on special assignment (who could be expected to be reluctant to give bad grades to fellow teachers and principa's). Perhaps this acceptance of these "data" unconsciously allows him to rationalize and reduce the dissonance between his intuition about the difficulty of implementation and his personal incentives to report success.

This dissonance is not atypical: It is generated by a role conflict inherent to middle-management positions. The middle manager is caught between bureaucratic demands for efficiency and uniformity, and the diverse, individualized needs of school practitioners with whom he may still partially identify. Faced with this conflict, middle managers often act in ways that neither challenge central policies nor effectively service school needs. Ironically, when these role conflicts remain unresolved, a differentiated organizational structure designed to facilitate change simply reinforces symbolic compliance and the illusion of change.

An organizational unit such as CAD cannot be an effective change agent without institutional support. For example, the assistant administrator of CAD, Bob Ryan, has ongoing contact with the reality of Project Today, but like Ducakis is unable to act in accord with his judgment about what's best for the project. Ryan, who was one of the principals originally involved in the project and was promoted partly because of its early success, knows the project is not working. He feels it cannot work without the sustained in-service training of teachers and, indeed, of principals.[11] But he also perceives that Morgan, Midville's business manager, would not support a costly undertaking. "Morgan runs the budget with an iron fist. He never listens to people on the line," Bob Ryan told us and voiced his frustration and feeling of helplessness by adding, "Morgan has a veto." Although Ryan routinely continues to administer his Project Today responsibilities, he has turned his energy and enthusiasm to the safer area of computer-assisted testing. Thus, the lack of institutional support can delimit the capacity of a differentiated organizational unit to facilitate change and can subvert the energies of potential change agents away from central educational concerns.

In summary, the Curriculum Assistance Division lacks both the influence and the resources to deal effectively with the complex task of carrying out an innovation in schools with an atmosphere of insularity and mistrust toward central admin-

[11] The present in-service training consists of lecture-style presentations, which Ryan believes are not effective. Rand's Change Agent Study supports that view. See Berman and McLaughlin, 1977.

istrators. The incentives of CAD administrators motivate them to tacitly support rather than challenge the principal's game of compliance. They too thereby reinforce the illusion of change.

The Central Office: Politics and the Subordination of Delivery Concerns

Midville's central administrators do not actively participate in the game of compliance as much as allow it to happen. They are preoccupied with their own concerns that can be far removed from the reality of educational programs.

Whether one attends the superintendent's cabinet meetings or listens to casual conversations at social gatherings among Midville's officials, the talk seldom concerns children. Power and politics occupy center stage: Who would win or lose in the latest reorganization; how Superintendent Lorenz would mollify the board, would cope with a hostile press that plays up his tendency to say opposite things to different audiences, or would placate and mediate among Business Manager Morgan, Deputy Superintendent Foster, and Assistant Superintendent Greer, all of whom covet his job; how the HEW noncompliance order on desegregation would be finessed; how the board's back-to-basics push could be satisfied just enough to take the pressure off; how the latest economic crunch could be handled; how to deal with the teachers' union. This preoccupation of Midville's central administrators with political and bureaucratic concerns leaves little space on their agenda for dealing with the long-term business of such educational innovations as Project Today.

Because high-level district officials are not involved in the day-to-day operation of the educational program, it is easy to underestimate how important their support—or lack of support—for educational innovations can be. To appreciate the district's role in creating the conditions that sustain the illusion, rather than the reality, of change, let us trace the key decisions about Project Today made by the Midville school board and central administrators.

The district's first "decision" regarding Project Today was the decision to seek a federal Title III grant. In 1967, John Greer—then head of the Elementary Division—arranged to have a small amount of money and time allocated to proposal writing. The proposal for Project Today called for a three-year trial of the reading program at two Title I schools. It asked for neither district funds nor special assignment of district personnel. Moreover, it did not appear to threaten anybody's prerogatives in Midville's bureaucracy. On the contrary, this limited educational innovation seemed well within the domain of Greer's Elementary Division. Therefore, in accordance with the tacit rule among district administrators of not interfering in someone else's "fiefdom," the Project Today proposal was routinely submitted to the board.

From the board's perspective, the Title III grant presented an opportunity for the district to be progressive and to get its share of federal largesse. The board thus rubber-stamped its approval, as it had done with many other proposals for self-contained and soft-money innovations that had not involved important issues for board members' varied constituencies.

Neither the board nor high-level administrators had much contact with Project

Today during its three-year "trial" period. It became an agenda item, however, in the budget cycle of fiscal 1971 when federal funding was scheduled to end.[12]

At that point, Midville's bureaucratic factions engaged in an implicit negotiation over the fate of Project Today. As we shall see, the bargaining resulted in a "Pareto Optimal" solution: Some actors realized marginal gain, no one lost. Specifically, John Greer, who had recently become assistant superintendent, supported the project's expansion. He was satisfied with its success and felt educationally committed to the ideas of individualization and continuous progress learning, but he had little time to devote to making a case for the project.[13] The job of preparing a continuation plan and presenting the administration's position to the board was delegated to the administrators of the Curriculum Assistance Division, which had been newly established. It seems to us that CAD administrators at that time needed a core program to solidify their own unit as well as firmly establish the importance of the role of district specialists.[14] In any event, they proposed to use Project Today as a district-wide program to deal with reading deficiencies, including declining test scores.

To present a united front to the board, Business Manager Morgan had to be persuaded that the district could afford to carry this "special" project in light of his view that "this district has stayed alive the last five or six years on the back of the business division."[15] Perhaps to counter Morgan's real or expected opposition, CAD administrators advanced Project Today as applicable to all schools in the district. In Title I schools, it would pay for itself because of the availability of targeted federal funds; in mainline schools, few additional expenses would be incurred. This low-cost dissemination strategy passed Morgan's budgetary inspection, although it meant that Project Today would be seriously underfunded.

Superintendent Lorenz saw the above strategy for Project Today as an opportunity to give Midville an easily identifiable, up-to-date reading program. His positive

[12] Rand's Change Agent Study shows that projects started in the fashion described above—lacking full district support as a means of dealing with a central district priority—are likely to be continued in only a symbolic way. It is typical in these cases for districts *not* to plan for the continuation of projects at the projects' outsets; districts that do plan for the project's continuation even before the award of a federal grant are likely to continue the projects in a serious way on their own funds. See Berman and McLaughlin, 1977.

[13] Assistant Superintendent John Greer had the most contact with Project Today. Greer, a singular exception among Midville's administrators, might be called a psychological cosmopolitan—energetic, open, dedicated to education, creative, and widely respected in the Midville School District. Greer was responsible for initiating almost all of Midville's educational innovations over a ten-year period, including Project Today, and has attempted to institute broadly based decision processes into the mainstream of district life. He is an idea man who lets others follow through. The capacity for giving people true responsibility is a rare leadership trait that can allow organizational members to realize their potentials. But given the pervasive mistrust and the fear of risk-taking characteristic of Midville, Greer's subordinates have not yet broken their tendency to guard personal and bureaucratic self-interests. Because he stands alone, the programs Greer begins are seldom carried out in line with their promise. Perhaps in recognition of this problem, Greer has recently devoted more of his energies to implementation.

[14] This inference is purely a conjecture on our part, for we found it very difficult to probe into the sensitive area of the motivations of CAD administrators. We pieced together the story of bureaucratic negotiations by interviewing all the major participants as well as knowledgeable informants within and outside the district. With the exception of our conjecture about the CAD administrators, we drew inferences about the motivations of key actors only when a high degree of consensus among our respondents clearly pointed to a conclusion.

[15] Business Manager Morgan has good reason to be proud of his accomplishments. He runs an extraordinarily efficient operation and has saved the district considerable money by clever land purchases and leasing arrangements with the city. He has considerable power in district affairs and has strong support from the local business community. But his haughtiness and widely perceived willingness to place financial concerns before delivery concerns have brought him many enemies that make his aspirations to become superintendent unrealistic.

recommendation to the board visibly demonstrated his own progressiveness.[16] The board, under pressure about the district's test scores, liked the project's use of behavioral objectives as a means of pinpointing reading deficiencies. Moreover, the idea that a uniform reading program could be used by all the schools seemed highly desirable. Accordingly, they issued their mandate to install Project Today as the official reading program in 1971. Each year since then, they have reaffirmed support for the project after a pro forma public presentation.

The story of Project Today ends with as little drama as it began. Heralded as a successful innovation and disseminated throughout the state, Project Today is pointed to with pride as Midville's individualized reading program. Yet it has foundered on the shoals of insularity and mistrust at the school level: Teachers go along with the project but think nothing new is involved; principals feel they must comply by reporting success; middle-level managers lack influence and resources and have incentives that perversely work to confirm symbolic success; central administrators are distant from the educational reality of the schools, are preoccupied with their own agenda, and have neither the incentives nor the unity of purpose to challenge the project's claims or assist the project's implementation. And thus without design and without malice, Midville maintains its status quo and the illusion of change.

THE CATCH-22 OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE EFFORTS

Project Today's evolution shows how an educational innovation reflected and reinforced Midville's existing organizational culture and behavioral patterns, rather than changed them. Insularity and a lack of a common delivery purpose were among the factors explaining Project Today's failure. If these organizational conditions could be changed, then real reform might be possible. Midville did attempt to overcome the school's insularity by instituting a decentralization plan and did seek to provide a common sense of purpose by adopting Management by Objectives. These attempts to change the organization could not overcome the endemic forces for maintaining the status quo.

Management by Objectives

In 1970, Superintendent Lorenz launched a district-wide policy of Management by Objectives (MBO), establishing contracts between superiors and subordinates in which the subordinates are held "accountable" for reaching agreed upon objectives specified in terms of outcomes. From Lorenz's perspective, this strategy had several attractive features. It was an up-to-date and highly visible organizational innovation that could establish his reputation (both within the district and with his peer group of superintendents) as being progressive. It would appear to board members as a way for them to assert district-wide goals and introduce accountability.[17] It

[16] Lorenz came from a smaller suburban school district. Appointed superintendent in 1968 with a charter to introduce progressive reforms and an understanding to comply with board directions, he has never managed to capture the system and to this day is openly viewed as an "outsider." He has continuously battled with the board, has no power base in the community, has not won the respect, trust, or loyalty of administrators or teachers, and considers his days as superintendent numbered.

[17] A newly passed state law required school districts to institute accountability procedures. Thus, the program would allow the district to comply with the letter of the law—a principle highly valued in Midville.

might be a way for Lorenz to assert his authority over a staff that considered him an outsider. And, indeed, it might erode the insularity of the schools.

Midville adopted MBO with much initial fanfare. The board and superintendent announced their intention of having all teachers and staff participate in formulating, in the words of the official announcement published in local newspapers, "unified, coordinated educational goals" for the school district. Phil Genesky, a popular long-time assistant superintendent who had no line responsibilities and was being readied for graceful retirement, was assigned the task of collecting everyone's "inputs." He organized a series of meetings at each school in which representatives of teachers and curriculum coordinators discussed and selected major goals and subgoals for their schools and curriculum programs. From these statements, district level goals were formulated and adopted by the board. According to a district brochure sent to parents, each year these goals and objectives are updated by a "participatory process" and are said to be used as the basis for "future course development and present course evaluation." They also serve as reference points for the MBO contracts.

Despite rhetoric to the contrary, neither the statements of goals nor the use of contracts have changed Midville's organizational patterns of delivery or educational services. The sample of teachers we spoke to felt that the process of setting goals was mostly "top-down" and that the objectives were just formal statements of "what's going on anyway." They were not troubled by the contracts because principals "don't take it seriously." Principals ritualistically formulated their contracts. As one principal told us, "I put down what the school has already done or I know we can easily do. Who would take a chance?" Or, as another principal confided, "At first I thought it might be a problem. But it's really just more paperwork." The area superintendents had no incentives to press the principals, whose support they must have to satisfy their own contract objectives. Thus, the ritual of MBO played itself out all the way up the hierarchy of Midville's administration.

This organizational innovation predictably was co-opted by the system. It altered the form and not the substance of staff relations. To improve relationships, the culture of the system—staff attitudes, norms, and beliefs—must be receptive to change. But such receptivity implies trust in and among the staff, which was not the norm in Midville. For example, concerning teachers in the district, Superintendent Lorenz remarked in an unguarded moment, "Innovators? They're just routine people doing a routine job. You can't expect ideas to come from them." Ironically, if Midville had the trust and professionalism that would permit MBO to work, MBO would not have been necessary.

Decentralization

Midville's 1971 decentralization into area superintendencies faced the same distrust, insularity, and concern with guarding one's personal and bureaucratic self-interest that rendered MBO nothing more than a ritual. And it met a similar fate.

No one in Midville could recall a pressing need for the adoption of the district's decentralization plan. Instead, several abstract rationalizations were cited—to lower effective responsibility toward the school level, to bring schools together by making them aware of common problems, to promote a K–12 articulation, to increase administrative control, to increase administrative efficiency. Midville's de-

centralization has accomplished none of these purposes, and one need only look at the actual role of the area superintendent to understand why.

The area superintendents have neither gained the trust of principals nor have they been given the discretionary power from the central office that would be appropriate to their formal authority. When the decentralization plan was announced, many principals felt their autonomy might be threatened. They soon discovered they had little to fear. Principals learned to comply symbolically to the new regulations. If principals wanted exceptional treatment from the district, they went around the area superintendents because "they can't decide." "If I want something done," said one principal, "I go right to Morgan or Jack Greer." The area superintendents do not have much operational power, partly because they felt unable to assert their nominal authority. For example, although they formally report to Assistant Superintendent Jack Greer, the area superintendents are wary of taking any actions that would rouse the disapproval of Deputy Superintendent Foster, Lorenz's right-hand man and Greer's superior. The area superintendents thus fulfill their jobs by being, at best, facilitators of principals' needs and, at worst, bureaucrats who create another layer between central administrators and school realities.

Decentralization, like MBO, faltered on and ultimately maintained the implicit insularity it sought to change. Once again we see how the organizational patterns of a maintenance system have a built-in stabilizing tendency.

"MARSHMALLOWING" AN EXOGENOUS SHOCK

We have thus far illustrated how cultural and structural patterns characteristic of Midville subverted the objectives of an educational innovation. We also showed that the ineffectiveness of two major organizational reform efforts could be explained by their inability to overcome the stabilizing tendency of Midville's organization. It has often been argued, however, that shocks from the outside can upset a stable system. We now describe how Midville reacted to the main exogenous shock affecting it in the mid-1970s, a desegregation order.

Midville's minority student population (12 percent black and 16 percent Spanish surname) are concentrated in a deteriorated area of the city, whose racial and ethnic composition has changed dramatically during the past two decades. HEW's Office of Civil Rights investigated the racial balance in the schools and issued a series of charges detailing racial imbalance. The current situation is that unless Midville shows progress toward correcting the imbalance, the district faces a cutoff of federal funds.[18]

Midville first denied and temporized about the problem. Superintendent Lorenz followed what he privately calls a "marshmallowing" tactic with HEW officials—making ambiguous statements that express his private sympathy with desegregation on the one hand, and his difficulties in trying to convince the board and the community on the other hand. For public consumption, he officially calls the charges "allegations." Although the board is divided on the issue, it has indicated

[18] Midville's two minority communities are divided against each other and neither has seriously pressured the school system. Although the black community is more vocal, neither it nor white liberal supporters have sued the district to correct segregation.

its intention to take any HEW cutoff decision to the courts, rather than be forced into some such plan as mandatory busing.

Second, the administration, with board approval—again the board was sharply divided—adopted a magnet school plan in which a new high school, Paul Revere, was built in the black area and was provided with a modern educational program featuring many attractive options. Rather than busing black students to existing (white) schools, the board hopes that white middle-class students will voluntarily enroll in Revere.[19]

Once again, Midville's major actors disagree about the needs and priorities addressed by the magnet school decision. The superintendent contends that the building of a new high school in the black area was a response to demands from the black community to retain a school in their neighborhood. Lorenz said that he dramatized the community's wishes by arranging a board meeting in the unairconditioned school cafeteria on a very hot night. Lorenz thus represents Revere as a district response to community pressure and wishes.

Albert Watson, a conservative board member, interprets these events differently. Watson charges that the administration forced the magnet plan through—in the time between HEW investigation and the subsequent report of HEW findings—as a means of defusing the expected conclusions of HEW's report. Watson was strongly opposed to building Revere—which he thought would merely be a "black gilded cage"—and tried a number of tactics to delay or stop plans to build the school. Watson said that he kept trying to find out where the report was and when it would be presented. He personally called HEW officials, who said they had informed Superintendent Lorenz to go slow. Watson claims, however, that the superintendent never told anyone about this conversation and proceeded "full steam ahead." (Lorenz represents Watson's views differently. According to Lorenz, Watson was opposed to the building of Revere not because it would lead to a "black gilded cage" but because it would mean that the Anglo kids would have to be bused if integration were to be achieved.)

Assistant Superintendent Genesky presented yet another opinion. He told us that the new schools did *not* reflect the wishes of the surrounding community. He believes that the black community wants integration, but the broader Midville community does not. According to Genesky, if Lorenz was responding to community wishes, they were not the wishes of the black community but of the more powerful Anglo community.

Jack Greer says he supported the construction of Revere as a magnet school because he saw it as a true opportunity for change. He hoped Revere could be built and staffed so as to include a wider offering of alternatives for students and be a demonstration site for innovative ideas. Greer believes the school then would attract students from all parts of the district and thus achieve racial balance.

Although Revere is in many respects impressive in its facilities and offerings for students, it has turned out not to be the magnet that Greer hoped, but the "black gilded cage" that Watson feared. The school remains predominantly black. Instead of attending Revere, the best students from the black community take advantage of the district's voluntary busing plan to be bused to the Anglo high schools. Staff at Revere, many of whom were recruited by Greer's enthusiasm and the promise

[19] The district provides free bus service to support this activity.

of an opportunity to try new ideas, are reportedly disappointed and frustrated. According to a voluntary counselor at the school, the district (not including Greer) has failed to support the program and activities orginally planned for Revere—either financially, politically, or emotionally.

This instance of an exogenous shock did not significantly change Midville's organizational status quo. Exogenous shocks can be a catalyst for change only if they are accompanied by an organizational process of mobilization. Midville mobilized neither the resources, the commitment, nor the publicity necessary to penetrate the preserves of the Anglo high schools and engage principals and staff in the effort to make voluntary busing work.[20] The same organizational patterns that subverted internally generated change efforts apparently absorb exogenous shocks and thereby keep the system insulated in its environment.

SUMMARY: A MAINTENANCE PROTOTYPE

Midville is a prototype of the state of maintenance. The school district appears to be immune to a wide variety of change attempts—locally generated educational innovation, structural modifications, and exogenous shocks. There clearly is "movement" in Midville, but it beclouds the reality of non-change. Explanations of this phenomenon lie neither in villains nor in dramatic events. The dynamics of maintenance in Midville reside in the mundane operations of people just doing their jobs while constantly guarding their personal and bureaucratic self-interest. The milieu encourages a tacit understanding—not to rock the boat; the school district organization consists of segmented parts primarily related to each other in terms of formal authority; the school district ethos is one of efficiency, uniformity, and formal compliance. Adaptation without change thus has no single or simple cause. It is a mixture of ingrained beliefs and organizational patterns that join to preserve Midville as it is.

The ideal maintenance system generally resolves its problems of adaptation by:

1. *Delivery uniformity.* A maintenance system seeks uniformity in operation through standardization of bureaucratic guidelines and procedures. Ironically, the school's insulation from central control means that uniformity does not occur, except in symbolic terms.
2. *Loose-coupling.* The internal structure of maintenance systems exhibits insularity—schools are isolated from each other and from central administration. Moreover, trust between management levels is lacking, and authority relations have a top-down style. Feedback between levels in the system is a routinized (often symbolic) reporting that merely satisfies bureaucratic pressures.
3. *Closed boundary.* The maintenance district protects itself from outside pressures and influences. This phenomenon cannot be accurately charac-

[20] Greer, perhaps recognizing the need to mobilize the staff throughout the district, has recently assumed personal responsibility for carrying out the magnet school concept. He initiated a series of working sessions at his home—something that no one could remember a Midville administrator ever having done—to plan for the staff's participation. Unless Greer can achieve more effective power in the system, the odds against a true mobilization of the staff—the prerequisite for the success of the magnet school—are still great.

terized as "resistance to change" or "organizational rigidity." More subtle mechanisms operate to *absorb* rather than *resist* and to *co-opt* rather than *comply*. Attempts to change such a system by a frontal assault of outside directive are found to be as counterproductive as the use of outside incentives have been disappointing. Both cases fail to reckon with the stable nature of the system. The system's defense mechanisms are too powerful —where they cannot absorb, they co-opt; where they cannot co-opt, they isolate; where they cannot isolate, they increment.

4. *Bureaucratic goal orientation.* The system's operative goals are defined in terms of bureaucratic or political interests—one interest being maintenance itself. Moreover, the predominance of bureaucratic concerns shapes and constrains the agenda in the delivery area.
5. *Lack of risk-taking.* The incentives and control structures in this system act perversely to discourage risk-taking. There is a reliance on formal authority relations, routinized behavior, control, uniformity, and "safe" reactions to pressures. The net result is incremental individual and programmatic decisionmaking at all levels.

These theoretical lessons begin to sketch the characteristics of the state of maintenance. However, the particular setting and circumstances of Midville have not allowed us to explore other factors that might contribute to maintenance or, conversely, to development. In particular, the school district environment was not important in Midville; the community is generally indifferent to the schools and would not be expected to intervene in school affairs unless community norms were at issue. The next case involves a situation in which the politics of the community played a major role.

IV. IDEOLOGY AND DECAY

Even in the placid political setting of Midville, district officials seemed to fear that unstable community forces might intrude on the professional operation of the schools. This presumed danger helped to establish "stability for the sake of stability" as a major operative goal of the system.

Johnstown, the next case, represents an instance in which the latent turbulence of a school district's environment became real. What can happen to school district operations in this situation? We have argued that the state of maintenance has equilibrating dynamics that make it a stable state relative to a wide range of environmental changes. How stable is the system and what aspects of it are vulnerable to destabilizing political forces?

DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS AND POLITICAL FLUCTUATIONS IN JOHNSTOWN

Until about 1970, Johnstown was a progressive community whose schools were innovative in spirit and successful in their pursuit of high-quality education. Today, however, both the community and its schools are marked by ideological contention; the educational achievements of the past are being eclipsed as the politics and power struggles of the broader community are played out in the schools.

Johnstown is the home of highly active and politically involved citizens on opposite ends of the American political spectrum. For years these people have fought out their battles in the school system. In the past, the issues have included "permissiveness," sex education, and textbooks, all part of liberal and conservative philosophies in the politics of American education. Despite these battles, activists shared a common concern for quality education. This underlying agreement allowed them to form a loose coalition that supported school district efforts to locate and employ high-quality staff from all around the country. Thus, the system gradually built a state-wide reputation for excellence.

Against this background and political history, the dominant—indeed the overwhelming—fact of Johnstown's external environment has been a radical demographic shift that has taken place over the last 10-15 years: The district's enrollment has changed from an overwhelming majority of Anglo-Caucasian students to a decided minority of Anglos.

The net drop in Anglo-Caucasian student population between 1961 and 1975 has been 53 percent. During the same period, black student population nearly tripled, and Spanish-surname student population rose 240 percent. However, the most significant changes came between the years 1969 and 1973, when Anglo-Caucasian student population dropped 39 percent, black student population rose 11 percent, and Spanish-surname student population rose 20 percent.[1]

[1] Since 1973, the percentages of black and Spanish-surname students as a proportion of total enrollment have been increasing, but this is due more to continued steady growth in these populations than to additional high losses of Anglo-Caucasian students.

By the mid-1960s, many Anglo-Caucasian parents began to perceive this dramatic demographic shift as a threat to their status and life situation, to the quality of their children's education, and to their children's safety in the schools. Their uneasiness was not allayed by decisions of Johnstown Unified School District (JUSD).

As a result of a court order in 1970, the district took firm steps to deal with the change in the ethnic makeup of its student population.[2] This decision triggered another eruption in the cycle of Johnstown education politics: Familiar slogans and philosophies were called forth in new guise, the community was once again sharply divided, and debates over educational concerns reflected broader ideological issues. The manifest issue this time was forced busing, but with it came an intense debate over fundamental education (read permissiveness), efficiency (read no new taxes), and neighborhood values (read property values). These themes strike a deep chord in Johnstown politics and reach far beyond those whose lives are affected by anything that happens in the school district.[3] The school system has thus become the battleground for deeply felt ideological convictions.[4]

The main lines of division in the community appear to be formed around social and political ideologies with the "liberals" (long-established, upper-class whites and poor blacks) generally aligned against the "conservatives" (new residents and lower middle-class whites). The community is about evenly split between these factions, leading to an unstable school board membership: Liberals controlled the board from 1969 to 1973; all five board members now are conservatives.

BOARD STRATEGIES OF CONTROL

The current board has used a number of strategies to impose its perspective on JUSD operations and bring about change in the school system that is consonant with its conservative ideological position. First, it has exercised unusual control over district staffing, particularly at the central office level. The board has removed some central office staff and tried to replace them with its own hand-picked staff members. A district official assessed this situation by commenting, "The board puts in loyalists as a way of helping its direct intervention—it is a way of implementing its policies without having to directly tell the superintendent to get it done." The legality of these moves has been challenged in the courts by district officials. As a result, two major positions have gone unfilled pending a series of appeals—the Assistant Superintendent for Elementary and Secondary and the Assistant Superintendent for Personnel and Support Services. Many teachers and administrators told us that delivery services have seriously deteriorated because of the absence of these positions.

[2] The court order was the result of a lawsuit brought by white parents worried about their property values. They saw desegregation as a way of closing off avenues of escape for those whites in the system who had been able to leave behind them schools and neighborhoods that were growing increasingly black.

[3] Most voters in Johnstown's school board elections are not parents; about half the population is either over 65 or under 18.

[4] A present board member commented: "The board is more concerned with the deterioration of a society than with their own political careers. We look to education to help solve many of the problems of social conflict."

Second, the board has bypassed regular channels of information and feedback to rely on its own (partisan) network. It has established a private network of informants among the staff and community. Board members use this private channel, as well as on-site inspection, to acquire "information," but this often leads to dysfunctional feedback. The board tends to talk only to the convinced and the partisan, and thus there are no adequate channels for critical information to reach them. Feedback in the system, especially from the bottom up, appears to be irregular, idiosyncratic, and keyed to the board's political and ideological positions.

Third, the board has effectively assumed direct responsibility for all educational policy in the district and exercises oversight and control over day-to-day system operations in Johnstown. All key decisions are in the board's hands; the board has publicly directed Superintendent Willard Shore not to make any major decisions on his own. Board intervention also has been felt in the classroom. For example, they have threatened to hold individual teachers accountable for student test scores. Many teachers and administrators feel that the board's strong emphasis on test scores has forced teachers to move away from treating children as individuals and instead emphasize strategies to get "kids past the tests." Numerous teachers told us that although this trend is probably a "general movement of our day," the increased emphasis on test scores in Johnstown is also a sign of the board's determination to become the "master control of the educational process." One principal voiced the concern of many of his colleagues when he said that test scores are emphasized because "They [board members] need a product that they can see and judge on a scale of one to ten and, on that basis, make decisions. Test scores are the only things that allow them to do that."

A 1975 board policy concerning the purchase of learning materials also has affected classroom practices. The board enacted a district policy requiring all requisitions to be approved by a special screening committee. This policy even had a retroactive feature; the board apparently wanted to review texts that had been approved by the previous board. Besides its demoralizing effect, this approval procedure is, according to a cross-section of district staff, cumbersome and time consuming. Although the board has actually turned down only three texts, the process takes about a month.[5] Most of the district professional staff believe members of the screening committee were chosen because of their ideological agreement with the board. For example, the head of the screening group was quoted as saying that the committee will attempt to rid the district of books dealing with immoral things, "sex, violence, and things like that." According to one principal, the board sees its struggle as one of reintroducing fundamental religious beliefs in the face of growing trends toward humanism.[6]

Fourth, the board has sought to close the system to outside input or influence. For example, it has eliminated all citizen advisory groups and task forces except those required by state or federal law.[7] Participation in the budget process has also

[5] At least one member of the board cannot understand why the teachers are so upset about the board policy. "I have told the teachers, if they have a vital need, for example some standard text, to call the district and we'll review it and have it for you in a day."

[6] Professional staff cite a number of examples of how narrow the "censorship" can be. For instance, an anthology was eliminated from the district program because one of the short stories included a passage that read, "Christ, I'm shot."

[7] The board has tried to do away with ESAA parent involvement as well. The board sent a request to HEW asking whether or not the district could return all the ESAA dollars except those for reading

been restricted. For example, the 1975 decisions marked the first time that the superintendent's budget committee did not include teachers, parents, members of the Chamber of Commerce, or students. All of these former parties to the budget decisionmaking process were excluded by order of the board.[8] Moreover, this year the superintendent—working under the direct control of the board—made the final cuts in the budget without sending the draft back to the budget committee, which traditionally had a chance to amend his initial recommendations. Budget tradeoffs have been resolved by executive decision, not by negotiations among staff and citizens. Decisionmaking has become more centralized, nominally in the hands of the superintendent but actually in the hands of the board. At the same time, the board has attempted to exercise control over the information that passes from the school system to the broader community.[9]

BOARD INFLUENCES ON THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

In this setting, it is not surprising to find that the board dominated the process of change and had assumed responsibility for setting and seeking district goals. For example, the board has been generally unwilling to seek federal funds to finance change efforts. The de-emphasis of federal dollars reflects the philosophy that federal money and concomitant restrictions are not needed, and as a board member put it, "The district should not be looking at all these innovative ways of doing things anyway, but should be sticking to basics." However, some staff noted that proposed new educational programs had to pass a "political litmus test." For example, we were told, in confidence, that no Title VII proposals had been written this year because those responsible for their creation felt that the board would not approve them. Several teachers said that the board had turned down proposals for two math programs. One, a Title III proposal for dissemination of a New Math program that had been successful in JUSD was rejected, they felt, because the board did not support New Math (in fact it has mandated "old" math in its Basic Schools).[10] The board has also refused to participate in Project Communicate, a federally funded, closed-circuit TV project.

Most observers and participants agree that these actions have depressed the general climate of innovation in the district. For example, a prominent member of the community felt that the board-induced atmosphere has reduced creativity and "has cut off innovation." An observer from the local press remarked, "The board has 'gutted' the district—the atmosphere is not conducive to change; the board turns off teacher requests for innovation and innovation money." Finally, the superintendent himself said: "Innovation, for all intents and purposes, is dead here."

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and math. HEW said no. The board has contemplated dropping the program altogether, but considers this a politically explosive move.

[8] The district's classified employees are now suing the board to prevent the implementation of the new budget.

[9] Several staff mentioned the existence of a "gag rule" in Johnstown. On the face of it, it does not appear to be much more than what one would expect to find in a school district—a requirement that the superintendent be kept informed about the kind of information that is being released to the public. But in the Johnstown atmosphere, this is translated by the staff as a gag.

[10] Another example cited was of a Title III proposal for the application of math to science that the board did not permit to be forwarded to the state Department of Education. This proposal was subsequently given to a neighboring district, which used this application to win a Title III grant and is now carrying out the program in the district.

Although the board has inhibited staff-initiated innovations, it has carried out one major change in the district. The "showcase innovation" is the Basic School, which was begun by board directive shortly after the conservative majority took office. It opened in September 1973 as a K through 8 school, and expanded to K through 12 in 1974. It now enrolls 1500 students and has a long waiting list of mostly Anglo-Caucasian students. The school emphasizes classroom structure, courtesy, discipline, dress code, and patriotism. Teaching concentrates on fundamental academic skills. The school policy is to reward student achievement. In contrast to the board's intervention in the operation of other schools, the Basic School is left largely to the principal, who was selected by the board. Two other Basic Schools have been started since 1974; the latest is a primary school (K-3). The Basic Schools have drawn wide publicity and have been the center of much attention and controversy in the district.

It is too early to assess their full effect. Their supporters claim that test scores already demonstrate the superiority of the Basic School concept and say that they are in fact markedly different in culture and process from other schools in the district. On the latter issue, opinion in the district is sharply divided. Some administrators and teachers express considerable bitterness about the Basic Schools, claiming they are not really different, but are doing what all of the other schools in the district have always done, only with more fanfare.

The pedagogic value of the "Basics approach" is a subjective as well as a controversial issue. We feel it would be inappropriate for us to judge its utility for students. We can, however, assess JUSD's approach in terms of the same organizational criteria we used to evaluate Midville's mandated educational innovation, Project Today—namely, can the Back-to-Basics approach produce lasting and significant change at its present sites and can it be effectively spread throughout the district?

Volunteer staff at the present sites generally accept the Basics approach. Nonetheless, several of these teachers privately admit to less than full commitment to the approach, and several more committed teachers feel they have not changed their (traditional) teaching practices. Because the extremely tense situation in Johnstown prevented extended visits to the classrooms, we cannot confidently say whether genuine change had occurred in teaching practices.

It was easier to gather opinions about the likelihood of these "trial" schools serving as the seedbed for overall change in Johnstown's teaching practices. Most board members originally conceived of the Back-to-Basics schools as models for the district, not as alternatives to other teaching methods in the district. After several years, they now recognize that they cannot—at least in the short run—expect to transform all Johnstown's schools. Consequently, the board has shifted its agenda. The Back-to-Basics schools are now advertised as an "alternative," and the board is seeking to generate enough support for the schools so that they could survive any "liberal" change in the board's membership.[11]

[11] A large majority of the sample of district staff we interviewed also shifted their opinions. Most staff were originally against Back-to-Basics. However, as the idea of alternatives has come into currency, these respondents seem more willing to tolerate the approach so long as they are not forced to follow it.

INSTITUTIONAL DECAY IN JOHNSTOWN

Board policies and activities in Johnstown have resulted, in our judgment, in the erosion of organizational procedures that are critical to the effective functioning of the school system. In short, the school system is in a state of institutional decay.

As we have seen, the board uses no established information channels, and institutionalized feedback structures within the school district have disintegrated. For example, Superintendent Shore, like the board, depends solely on personal sources. He uses his own network of key contacts, talks with many people in the community, and visits the schools. Board interference in district staffing has led Shore to forgo traditional line and staff channels. Principals tend to circumvent the board-appointed directors for elementary and secondary education and deal primarily with the superintendent. Shore permits this circumvention because he lacks confidence in his subordinates and would rather undertake much of their formal responsibility himself. As one participant noted, it would be impossible to draw an organization chart for Johnstown at the present time—it is administratively managed by one man and the board.

It is difficult to assess the ultimate consequence of this slide from an effectively functioning system into a state of institutional decay. In terms of the quality of educational delivery, the state of system "health" apparently has not yet begun to seriously impair delivery of educational services in Johnstown. Because JUSD was able to recruit an excellent staff in its more peaceful years, the quality of education remains adequate and, often, is fairly high. A staff member commented, "Everybody is really carrying on; we are professionals and will do the job no matter what."

There are significant signs that the ability (or interest) of the professional staff to "carry on" may be declining. One indication is the growing weariness of teachers with the tensions in the district and with the increasing constraints on their professional autonomy. One teacher observed, "The board attack has stopped innovation and experimentation, and battle fatigue is setting in. I don't know how many years it will take before things start slipping."

A second and more widespread cause for concern about the maintenance of classroom delivery is the patently low morale of many teachers; a long-time observer of the district noted, "Teacher morale in this district has hit an all-time low." Board personnel moves as well as intensive monitoring of teacher and building activities have led many teachers to feel that individuals with divergent views will be transferred, released, or demoted and that freedom of action and expression has been extinguished in Johnstown.[12] One participant noted that many administrators and teachers in the district are doing what they are doing "essentially because they are scared." Similarly, a former school board member remarked, "The current motivation to act in the district [is] primarily one of fear." Several teachers told us privately that they would leave if the job market were not so tight.

The critical difference between this and the typical board of education is that this board does not lay out policy directions and leave the implementation to the professional staff. Nor does it content itself with putting strong pressure on the professional staff to carry out policy according to board desires or time tables. They

[12] For example, last year the board published a list of 14 people whom they were going to remove from administrative jobs and put back into the classrooms. These people were all opposed to the board.

trust neither the ability nor the goodwill of the educational professionals and feel they must rapidly push through their policies and follow up with close supervision. This board has intervened in the life and functioning of the bureaucracy itself. It has put its own people into positions of power, has partially co-opted and cowed the bureaucratic and political leaders of the professional organization, and has set about to dismember the central staff. These challenges to the district bureaucracy have naturally resulted in a parallel polarization among teachers and administrators, in an atmosphere of suspicion and divisiveness, in the closing of information channels, and in the ascendancy of symbols over rational discourse.

The board's fierce challenge to any external or internal authority that promotes opposing programs or philosophies, the extreme distrust of the professional educators whose ideas the board has in part been elected to oppose, the creation of independent and irregular channels of information and the promotion of a network of informants, the intervention in administrative and operational functions of the professional staff, the attack on the central organizational structure through the elimination of positions and the substitution of hand-picked board administrators all have thrown the district bureaucracy off balance and have seriously challenged its ability to maintain the functions of the system through the continued initiation of policies designed to meet the changing demands of the environment. In effect, the board has brought the external world into the system through its own actions and has thrown the system into a state of confusion and decay.

The school board has explicitly elected to take these risks of institutional decay. Their theory of change is one of fiat. As described by a reporter for the local newspaper, it is "change at the point of a lance." In effect, they are taking the calculated gamble that imposing their ideologically based policies will have a greater payoff than a necessarily slow consensus-based process of change. Paradoxically, in establishing a quick victory, they have had little choice but to try to attack and subvert the organizational structure whose very operations are necessary if the changes they wish are to be sustained. In short, they may be sacrificing long-term stability for short-run change.

SUMMARY: THE BALANCE BETWEEN MAINTENANCE AND DECAY

Johnstown presents an instance of the effects that a turbulent social and political environment can have on school district operations. As a result of bitterly contested school board elections, one political faction has temporarily gained control of the governance machinery of Johnstown Unified School District. This faction tends to impose ideological views on the day-to-day operation of the district. The result is a distortion of the board's representative function, and those who are not represented feel powerless, frustrated, angry, and determined to reverse matters. Inevitably, this polarization will perpetuate sharp shifts and seesaw changes in the politics of the district.

Because school board reform measures of the 1920s were quite successful in removing educational administration from the arena of partisan politics and thereby partially insulating school operations from transient political perturbations, a tacit understanding has evolved between school boards and school administration.

Except for issues of finance and external relations, many school boards simply rubber-stamped the decisions and recommendations of the professional staff. However, in recent years, board composition and activities have become more political. As a result, the understanding between the board and the school system has become less clear as both board members and professsionals seek to renegotiate their roles. Johnstown represents an extreme instance in which the board has usurped traditional professional responsibilities, and in which the political battles of the broader community are being played out in the schools. In their pursuit of ideological goals, the board has caused the disintegration of those routine procedures that form the core of any maintenance system.

Reliance on standard operating procedures and feedback channels is necessary for a stable institution. But, as we have seen in Midville, such reliance may retard genuine change. Thus, the dilemma for school district development is that although these routinized procedures are necessary for stability, they can impede organizational growth.

The strategy chosen by Johnstown's board to address this dilemma was, in effect, to attack the stable core of the district organization—personnel recruitment, feedback channels, line and staff management. But they did so without regard for the long-term need to rebuild institutional patterns—that is, to replace the old organizational routines and structures with new ones.

It would be overdramatizing the situation to conclude that the school district's "survival" is at stake. We suspect that the sustained intrusion of the board will erode educational delivery and eventually degrade student learning, but even these consequences are unlikely to destroy the school system. Legal restrictions as well as political realities of a divided community constrain how far the board can go and still retain power. Moreover, the functioning of the delivery system itself—the individual schools and teachers—seems extraordinarily robust, even as the administrative structure above them gradually collapses. This resilience is attributable in part to the loose coupling of school systems: The vertical insularity of the schools from central control makes top-down change difficult; the horizontal separateness of schools from each other means that change—such as the Back-to-Basics movement—in one school may have little effect on other schools.[13] So whereas Midville illustrates that unintegrated loose coupling can frustrate system development, Johnstown illustrates that it also retards system decay.

Although the dissolution of a school district is unlikely, decay is an ever present but usually latent danger. Because the danger can increase when the local community is aroused, district officials, particularly superintendents, often act cautiously in their dealings with the board and with local power interests. However, insofar as they see their job as primarily one of preventing decay, they are unlikely to take the risks necessary for system development. How can the organizational patterns that prevent district development be broken without throwing the system into decay? How can school districts adapt with change? The next case illustrates how one district dealt with these questions.

[13] Weick (1976) presents similar observations about the functions and dysfunctions of loose coupling for school sytems.

V. ORCHESTRATED CHANGE IN A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

The middle 1960s marked a time for change in the city of Lakeville. Its small minority population (approximately 6 percent) was burgeoning in size (to approximately 20 percent a decade later) and in political prominence; the community power structure, benevolently dominated by a civic-minded elite of business leaders, began to address and reverse the deterioration of the core urban area; the Great Society social programs were taking hold; a sense of reform filled the air. The winds of change stirring Lakeville also set the context for a remarkable transformation of the Lakeville Public Schools.

Visitors to Lakeville schools in the 1950s would have witnessed a lack of excitement and a sameness from classroom to classroom. The crowded classroom conditions (an average class size of approximately 32 in lower grades) as well as the deterioration of buildings and physical plant contributed to a general district malaise. Lakeville's schools did not have an oppressive quality nor were they chaotically out of control as were some large urban ghetto schools, but neither did they generate a learning environment in tune with the mood for change in the community and with the openness to educational reforms being widely diffused throughout the country.

The organization of the school district itself seemed to have been preoccupied with maintaining the status quo. The superintendent, who had been in his position for almost two decades, was, according to a former school board member, "a man with no interest in change or advancement." He ran the school administration in a paternalistic and autocratic manner while the central staff performed routine bureaucratic functions. As a former management consultant to the district observed, central administrators "never left their offices to see the inside of schools." The familiar pattern of insularity of schools was the norm—principals controlled their domains autocratically and protected themselves and their schools from outside interference. Teachers worked "behind their classroom doors" and appeared demoralized. The petitions of the district's would-be innovators fell on unresponsive ears. Parents participated in the schools sporadically at best.

Lakeville's financial difficulties were approaching serious proportions. Per-pupil expenditures were low relative to both state and national figures, as were staff salaries. And, despite the marked decline of the schools, the public was unwilling to increase its financial support. In short, Lakeville Public Schools (LPS) were a prototypical maintenance system faced with many of those conditions afflicting most urban school systems in the 1950s—a competent but traditional staff, an insular educational delivery system, a rigidified bureaucracy, a deteriorating physical plant, an uncertain financial situation, and an increasingly difficult minority problem.

During the next decade, Lakeville turned itself around—its budget doubled, its staff became quite highly paid, its organization promoted innovations that have begun to affect delivery in profound ways, its bureaucracy became competent and responsive to delivery concerns, it began forthrightly to deal with desegregation, it involved itself with the community. Most important, Lakeville Public Schools

began the development of an organization that may have the capacity for continually adapting to new situations and opportunities.

This section examines Lakeville's impressive example of a school system's growth. We will examine several critical issues: What is the character of the process of change leading from the state of maintenance to a state of development? What environmental conditions and institutional choices encourage or permit this process? What is the nature of development and, in particular, what are its structural and cultural requisites?

CATALYSTS FOR CHANGE

The transformation of Lakeville Public Schools can be traced to a sweeping change in administrative leadership. In the mid 1960s, when the city began its social and economic revitalization, activist members were elected to the seven-member school board. The new members, who along with their colleagues were drawn from the city's elite business community, crystallized the board's determination to "get things moving."

The board at first attempted to intervene in school administration. For example, the superintendent had failed to promote several innovative district administrators who were locked in peripheral positions where their energies were blocked. The board tried to bypass the hierarchy by forcing the promotion of one of these innovative administrators to an assistant superintendency. However, their maneuver produced negligible results. The new assistant superintendent lacked the authority to reorganize the bureaucracy and could do little to influence those in power who did not share his feeling about the need for change. A second initiative involved the board's support of a federally funded program on individualized tutoring for juvenile delinquents. The project violated district precedent by employing unaccredited staff and by operating outside the standard school structure. Although this highly creative project was successful in terms of its limited objectives, it was an isolated pocket of change. The project had little chance of diffusing through the protective boundaries insulating the schools.

The board thus learned that its power to affect change by intervening directly in administrative decisions was limited and would be counterproductive, and the bureaucracy was too resistant to give way to incremental change. They decided to take strong action. They forcibly "retired" the old superintendent and placed their trust in a new superintendent to institute basic reform.

After an exhaustive national search, the board hired an extraordinary superintendent from a district in a different section of the country—Superintendent Vladimer Octavio Wilcox. They gave him a mandate: Put the financial house in order, get the community involved in the schools, deal with desegregation, and improve the quality of education in the schools.

In fact, Lakeville Public Schools partially realized these ambitious goals in less than ten years. But the value of the mandate lay in more than the substance of its goals. V.O. Wilcox used the legitimacy accorded him to begin a process of change that altered the Lakeville educational system in three fundamental areas—its relationship and interface with its environment, its organizational structure and cultural patterns, and its delivery of teaching and other social services.

ENVIRONMENTAL INTERFACE: OPENING OUTWARD AND PROACTIVITY

In the mid-1960s, the relationship of LPS to its environment can most simply be characterized as insular and reactive. For example, despite clear signs of increasing racial tension and pressures, LPS had either ignored or temporized about desegregation. The district's response to financial difficulties had similarly lacked initiative. The superintendent had called for local tax increases, which were not palatable to the community at that time, or hoped for infusions of state or federal funds. Moreover, the considerable intellectual, political, and financial resources of Lakeville's influential middle-class elite had not been tapped. And the strong traditional concerns for education among blue-collar workers and the city's various ethnic groups had found expression only in routine PTA matters.

Capitalizing on the school board's mandate, V.O. Wilcox moved to turn this reactivity into proactivity and insularity into openness.

The new active role assumed by the administration toward the district's environment can be easily seen in the way LPS overcame its financial problems. V.O. Wilcox launched a three-pronged approach. First, the district intensively lobbied the state legislature. Although a full-time lobbyist had been hired by the board a year before Wilcox's arrival, lobbying was not systematically pursued until the new superintendent took charge. The lobbyist vividly recalls Wilcox's instructions to him: "V.O. said, 'Let's go'." Over ten years, this lobbying campaign is widely acknowledged to have persuaded the state's rural-dominated legislature to establish new priorities for urban education. The result was a tripling of state aid to Lakeville and an authorization for Lakeville to hold a special bond election, which enabled the district to go forward with a large capital expansion program designed to replace LPS's deteriorating physical plant (the building was also used later to advance delivery and desegregation goals).

The new superintendent vigorously pursued opportunities to gain federal funds made available by the Great Society social programs. V.O. Wilcox made the recently appointed Director of Federal Projects a member of the superintendent's cabinet, a position that gave him considerable authority as well as sending a signal to the staff that outside funds for innovation could and would be pursued.[1] Beyond its share of Title I and other supplementary funds, the district was awarded funds for many Title III projects and received a large and long-term grant from a special federal program. The grant funded a comprehensive innovation, called the Options Program Trial (OPT), which became a major vehicle of change in Lakeville.

Wilcox also attempted to mobilize the two tiers of the local community—the civic-minded business elite and the lay public. The new superintendent considered it essential to form coalitions with the community power structure to gain their financial and political support. With the board's active help and their prestige, he took several steps: Blue ribbon committees were formed, private foundation support was generated, and community leaders were persuaded that the fate of the school district was an important element in the health of the city. Knowledgeable commentators agree that Wilcox was able to tap the strong strain of community

[1] Although the Director of Federal Programs had been appointed under the old superintendent (some say because of board pressure), several board members felt he did not have the full support of the old administration. He had been promoted to his position after serving successfully on the previously mentioned program for juvenile delinquents.

responsibility in Lakeville without violating tacit constraints implied by community norms and values.[2]

Gaining approval and generating active support from the general public in Lakeville has been a slower, less certain, and riskier process marked by controversy if not active conflict. Yet relative to the usual low community participation, considerable progress has been made. Like many school districts throughout the nation, the board and district adopted official policies aimed at greater citizen involvement. Most school districts, however, implemented these policies in the pro forma fashion we saw in Midville. Lakeville's administration, in contrast, has sought to establish citizen involvement as a district norm; the district has incorporated mechanisms for citizen participation into many aspects of policymaking—e.g., in the budget process—and in the operation of special educational programs.[3] For example, OPT required a strong element of parent participation, and its success over a five-year period enhanced the district's reach into the community and vice versa. Because of OPT and such efforts as decentralization and adult community education programs, parent awareness and satisfaction seem to be increasing (according to district-sponsored surveys). One measure of Wilcox's success in increasing community confidence in the district may be the results of local balloting during the early 1970s: Voters approved a tax increase and a bond measure, something they consistently refused to do during the otherwise affluent 1960s.

In summary, Lakeville changed its decisionmaking procedures from a mostly closed and reactive interface with its environment to a more open and proactive posture. The new superintendent and his hand-picked cabinet invited the risks of uncontrollable community demands and criticisms for the benefits of broad-based community support. The goodwill and trust thereby generated was an important factor in the mobilization of Lakeville's developmental efforts.

TRANSFORMING THE ORGANIZATION

The Lakeville story illustrates a characteristic of fundamental organizational change: When a system initiates a developmental process, many different elements

[2] Wilcox's efforts to mobilize the community ran the risk of opening the school system to public scrutiny and political influences and, in the extreme, it ran the risk of system decay. His pragmatic strategy seemed to be one of probing for the underlying consensus in the community, pushing the consensus as far as possible, and retreating when an issue threatened to destroy the consensus. For example, whatever Wilcox's private sentiments may have been about desegregation, his first approach using a voluntary transfer program was minimal and ineffective. The district was eventually sued, and a knowledgeable commentator suggests that V.O. was "happy to have his hand forced." Thereafter, the district moved rapidly to tie a desegregation plan into the OPT and building programs. We can only speculate that Wilcox had a political sense about the limits of his power. In any event, he did manage to walk the tightrope, and the district now appears to have excellent race relations.

[3] Many federal programs (e.g., Title I) mandate citizen participation, but these mandates seldom affect patterns of decisionmaking in most school districts (Berman and McLaughlin, 1977). Lakeville has generally gone beyond federal requirements and actively sought citizen involvement not only in special programs at the site level but also in the broader arena of school district management. One effort is the Lakeville Accountability Project. This project consists of a group of concerned citizens funded by the district and a local foundation to review district efforts at increasing citizen involvement (as well as other district policies). Ironically, their reports, though supporting the district's aims, are critical of and impatient about the district's implementation of citizen involvement. This instance illustrates how opening the system to the community does indeed risk controversy. In highly politicized settings, controversy can exacerbate community conflicts, but in a supportive environment criticism can be a healthy sign of increasing community commitment to the schools.

must change simultaneously. We have described how the district became active toward the environment. At the same time, the school district's organization underwent a process that left it far different from the rigidified and traditional bureaucracy of old LPS.

The bureaucratic task faced by V.O. Wilcox was to "unfreeze" organizational patterns, mobilize energies, and institute new structures.[4] To accomplish this task, the superintendent initiated a variety of steps aimed at principals and middle-level administrators, central leadership, and the teaching staff.

Principals and Middle-Level Management

On taking office, Wilcox transferred principals and middle-level managers to different positions, in his words to "unsettle the system." He also moved some staff to the central office for "R&R" and allowed them to retire gracefully. Moreover, he took a bold gamble. Lakeville had a salary schedule for administrators that was locked into the teachers' salary schedule—increases in teachers' pay automatically increased administrators' pay. Wilcox felt that this incentive structure perversely created a conflict of interest for principals. Consequently, the district's ability to coordinate principals and make them accountable was hindered. Despite vigorous objections from administrators, the superintendent, buttressed by reports of academic experts, persuaded the board to change the policy. To sweeten this bitter pill, he also got the board to raise administrators' salaries.

By these actions, Wilcox signalled that change was both desired and required and that principals had to take responsibility and actively pursue improved delivery and increased community participation. Within a year, the new salary procedure received almost unanimous praise from principals, according to the head of their association. This strategy had risked disrupting the system's standard operating procedures, but it helped unlock the incentive and control structure at the heart of maintenance (cf. Midville).[5]

But unfreezing the old structure and giving signals about new required behavior did not, in Wilcox's view, suffice to produce sustained change. New organizational patterns needed to be put into effect. A major move in that direction was a decentralization plan, begun in the early 1970s, that has evolved into an area administrative arrangement.[6]

The decentralization plan appeared to have a dual purpose. On the one hand, principals would come under direct control of a lower level of administration—namely, area superintendents—and thus could be held accountable. On the other hand, principals would receive more support from a more informed and more

[4] Neither Wilcox's public speeches nor private interviews describe his "strategy" in the analytical terms presented here. Although he may have formulated a conscious strategy along the lines sketched above, Wilcox's style is intuitive and pragmatic: He surely did not follow a "master plan." In short, we are interpreting a range of actions over many years in a more calculated and "rational" way than they occurred. The three-stage process suggested above has long been used to describe planned change efforts. See Lewin (1958); Bennis, Benne, and Chin (1969); Giacquinta (1973); Berman and McLaughlin (1974).

[5] Simultaneous development of support from the board and the community is critical in direct attempts to overturn bureaucratic resistance. Without such support, Wilcox's strategy might have been stalled or blocked and the security of his job jeopardized.

[6] The evolution of decentralization illustrates Lakeville's modal process of implementation, which is characterized by pragmatic adaptation. Decentralization came slowly, allowing a consensus to form as the patterns became woven into the district's desegregation efforts and options programs.

responsive bureaucracy. The hope was that such decentralization would promote a new pattern of professional relationships among administrative levels based on accountability and responsiveness. In "selling" the decentralization plan, Wilcox consistently let it be known in numerous public and private meetings that new ideas and taking chances would be valued behavior in Lakeville and would lead to increasing responsibility.[7]

The evidence on whether the decentralization plan has realized its promise is not in yet. Although it is continuing, all levels within and outside the district apparently agree that decisionmaking power has moved closer to the school level—both area superintendents and principals exercise more discretionary power in budget, curriculum, and personnel matters. Further, this new latitude operates within a consensus about common district purposes despite variability from area to area, and the process is far from fully realizing its goals. Thus, decentralization in LPS has not simply added another bureaucratic layer separating the schools from central policy and assistance as it did in Midville, it has begun to break down the insularity of the schools.

Creating Central Leadership

The second bureaucratic task involved creating responsive central leadership. New faces were brought into the downtown offices. Some of these "bright young men" were from outside the district and had backgrounds in community social programs. Others were creamed from existing talent in the district; they had worked together before—e.g., on the juvenile delinquency program—but their effectiveness had been limited because their activities were peripheral to the old LPS priorities. They rapidly provided the district with effective central leadership. Wilcox's willingness to trust in and share power with others enabled them to put their ideas into practice.

In particular, Wilcox formed a cabinet, including these innovative people, that developed a common ideology, a professionalism, a sense of mutual respect, a feeling of efficacy, and a consensus about district problems. And he allowed each central administrator the responsibility and authority to do his job. For example, he delegated authority to a deputy superintendent to oversee day-to-day operations of the district, leaving Wilcox to deal with political matters on the outside and with consensus building within the organization. Similarly, the key middle managers were assumed to be competent in their areas of authority and were expected to carry out central policy in their own ways, not to replicate a uniform design. Within the central leadership, creating new approaches to solving problems became a shared value; taking risks and constructively criticizing the system became a norm. As several central administrators and middle-managers told us independently but in almost identical language, "Innovations work because failure is allowed."[8]

[7] Wilcox's insistence on professionalism is illustrated in the following anecdote told by a principal. The principal recalled a time when he had disagreed with a district policy and told Wilcox that he was going to make his dissent public. Wilcox responded not by challenging the principal's right to dissent or by implicitly threatening reprisals, but by simply asking for a p. epublication copy of the text. The principal characterized this incident by saying, "You're not a 'boy' in this district."

[8] Many of the positions at the cabinet level were filled by people who were "generalists" rather than specialists in particular areas (e.g., finance). These generalists, who had competent staff working under them, felt no need to protect a fiefdom but instead shared a common concern with district goals. They could thus play a leading role in unfreezing the old system.

In this changed setting, a number of principals and low-level administrators feel they have more responsibility and make important decisions. They believe that the new organizational climate of responsive leadership has created the power for them to get their jobs done and simultaneously allowed their self-interests to be identified with delivery goals central to the school district. In this milieu, many of the ideas and innovative plans were not generated by Wilcox nor did he take credit for them. Yet the district's innovative thrust seemed to fit a pattern as if orchestrated by a common purpose. The common point of view and shared interests in delivery of these key actors thus permitted a subtle central coordination.

The responsibility, power, and professionalism promoted among Lakeville's central managers contrast sharply with the patterns described in the previous cases. Midville had either civil service bureaucrats or isolated specialists. And Johnstown's board used ideological conformity instead of professional competence as their criterion for administrators. The feedback and coordination functions served by middle management did not operate in these systems to promote change. Lakeville's emphasis on mobilizing professional leadership was a key element in developing the positive feedbacks that could link central delivery concerns to the activities and interests of the deliverers—the teachers.

The Teachers

The common point of view shared by Wilcox, his "bright young men," and LPS boards of the 1960s and early 1970s was the primacy of the delivery of quality education, the importance of "serving the kids." The third element of unfreezing the system was simple but critical—getting the message to teachers that the school district did in fact care.

Wilcox tried to make the message crystal clear. He visited every school in the district within his first year as superintendent, referred to teachers as "faculty," supported them during a teachers' strike, and invited their ideas on what needed to be changed. These activities were important as symbolic acts. Yet they would have been hollow had they not been backed by a changed administrative receptivity. The district demonstrated receptivity by creating incentives for teachers to take a chance on something new. For example, the district encouraged grass root submission of Title III proposals. Central administrators did not "prioritize" or screen those proposals but sent them directly to the state Department of Education for processing. In some districts, not monitoring proposals is a manifestation of central office indifference. However, given the supportive climate created in Lakeville, this policy reinforced the sense that teachers were respected as professionals. In addition, teachers have successfully petitioned the district for such complex innovations as open schools. Indeed, grass roots demand was one source of the alternative school program, OPT.

In conjunction with OPT but also as a continuing separate effort, in 1971 the district established a Lakeville Teachers Center (LTC) modeled after the British experience in peer instruction. The Teachers Center may make an important contribution to changing the teacher's traditional role for several reasons. First, Lakeville's teachers—and principals—can obtain in-service training on a continuous basis according to their own needs as they experiment with new ideas. Second, the LTC is partly run by teachers, which may help develop their capacity for participation in school decisionmaking. Third, according to results of both formative evalua-

tions conducted on a continuing basis by the district and summative evaluations performed by the government funding agency, the social and professional interactions among teachers from different schools have become more frequent. Such interactions may erode the traditional isolation of teachers from their peers.

Despite an encouraging beginning, the report card is not in yet on the district's efforts to alter the cultural and structural patterns of the teaching staff. On the one hand, perhaps a third of Lakeville's teachers seem firmly settled in their traditional ways.[9] These teachers, who are reported to be resistant to change efforts, tend to be concentrated in outlying schools that respondents refer to as "retirement schools." Tenure and the seniority system are usually blamed for the district's inability to make much progress in changing the traditional patterns of authority, attitudes, and instruction for these teachers. On the other hand, the energies and talents of Lakeville's creative teachers have steadily become channeled into comprehensive school-wide changes, without robbing them of their individuality. Rather than insisting on one "right" way for all teachers, Lakeville has begun to accept the intrinsic variation in style and quality of their staff. On balance, Lakeville has perceptibly moved away from the ethos of standardization and top-down control that were characteristic organizational patterns of the school districts previously discussed.

IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL DELIVERY

We have thus far described how Lakeville's board, superintendent, and administrators attempted over a period of five to ten years to develop an active and open posture toward the local community and toward federal and state agencies, and how they tried to unfreeze and restructure organizational patterns. But these steps might have been little more than change for its own sake had they been conceived of as ends in themselves. Instead, Wilcox endeavored to make sure that these political and bureaucratic activities were coordinated with, and subservient to, delivery goals—particularly improving the quality of education in Lakeville.

Specifically, Wilcox and the administrative staff emphasized, in numerous reports and publications during the late 1960s, their belief that improving the quality of educational delivery requires staff development and learning. They argued that an effective staff development program in turn requires an organizational climate that permitted individual differences and was conducive to experimentation. With these objectives in mind, they mobilized the board and the community in 1970 to support proposals for federal grants to help finance two comprehensive innovations, the Options Program Trial and its associated Lakeville Teachers Center.

These major change efforts have the potential for making the process of schooling more adaptive to student needs and parent preferences on the one hand, and to individual teaching styles on the other. The basic idea of OPT is to allow parents and students as well as teachers to choose among three alternative educational programs—open education, traditional education, and a mix of individualized techniques. Each school uses only one of these programmatic approaches and parents

[9] The estimate of one-third is quite approximate. It is based on reports from our respondents, public speeches by Lakeville's officials, district documents, and the results of several surveys. We doubt that the number is less than 25 percent or more than 50 percent.

and students may select the school of their preference. Within some restrictions imposed by seniority, teachers are free to choose and help develop the program that interests them.

It is highly significant that these structural changes at the school level were deliberately linked to opportunities for professional staff development. Not only could teachers receive necessary in-service training at the Lakeville Teachers Center, but the training was self-consciously tailored to individual teacher needs—needs defined by the teacher's interaction with the LTC staff of peers. Moreover, teachers participated in running the center, which, it was felt, would promote the sense of professionalism that is necessary to significant changes in delivery at the school level.

Although it is too soon to determine the long-run effect of Lakeville's alternative program on student learning, both supporters and former doubters generally agree that OPT's alternative strategy has thus far been effective in altering organizational patterns. OPT, whose five-year grant from the federal government ends this year, operates in about a quarter of the district and is being disseminated throughout the district's elementary schools.[10] The effects thus far on student achievement in the participating schools are difficult to tell, though local evaluations show some gains. Parent involvement in all three alternatives is unusually high and so is their satisfaction with the schools, according to district surveys.[11] Moreover, the quality of parent involvement—reflected in their assistance to schools and in their considered input to the schools' programmatic decisions—makes their participation very real.

The benefits for teachers involved in OPT also seem real. On-site observations confirm evaluations of the sponsoring government agency that a spirit of "democratic participation" and pride pervades these schools. Moreover, many teachers are initiating their own classroom activities, taking risks, and assuming responsibility for their professional development at the LTC.

Yet doubts continue to be raised as to whether the present OPT can be sustained and successfully disseminated throughout the district, or whether it will simply remain an "isolated showcase." Critics point out that the original OPT site had ideal conditions that cannot be duplicated elsewhere in the district—e.g., a parent-student population open to new ideas, a massive federal grant, and an area in proximity to a major university.

But these critics may be underestimating the extraordinary steps taken by Superintendent Wilcox to prevent isolation of the alternatives program. In particular, the district protected OPT in its early years. When OPT first began under the day-to-day guidance of a highly competent administrator, Wilcox kept the project's visibility low and confined his involvement to running political interference. But after OPT had weathered its initial difficulties, Wilcox made alternatives the heart of a comprehensive plan for district change that involved desegregation, decentralization, and an ambitious building program.

OPT was used as the model for a district-wide alternatives program to deal with desegregation. This strategy accomplished two ends: It satisfied the court's May 1972 desegregation order, and it provided political legitimacy for the district's

[10] Central administrators have made plans to introduce alternatives into secondary schools, but these plans seem vague.

[11] Our discussions with several parents supported these survey findings. We found these parents to be very enthusiastic about "their" schools.

comprehensive attempt to improve the quality of educational delivery. Some knowledgeable observers feel that the board, whose new members were less reform-minded than their immediate predecessors, would not have approved the administration's 1973 request to plan a city-wide alternatives program without the desegregation court order; other district officials believe alternatives were so successful that the program had enough momentum to be carried beyond its original experimental sites. In either event, the joint desegregation-alternatives strategy was feasible because the district could cluster three schools together in the same location, with each school devoted to one alternative. The district had actively pursued and had received the bonding authorization in the early 1970s that gave Wilcox the flexibility to build new school sites. The building plans were drawn to accommodate the dual desegregation-alternatives objective. Area superintendents, whose positions were created by the decentralization plan discussed previously, had the responsibility of overseeing the progress of the alternatives program.

By thus tying these district priorities together, Wilcox has made the fate of each one depend on the other and thereby may have assured district commitment for the difficult processes of alternatives, desegregation, and decentralization.

SUMMARY: MOBILIZATION AND THE PASSAGE TO DEVELOPMENT

Lakeville Public Schools have begun the complex transition from maintenance to development. The progress—slow, uncertain, controversial, and incomplete—has nonetheless been steady. Whatever other lessons it offers, the story of Lakeville's transformation provides concrete evidence that the organizational patterns maintaining the status quo can be broken without plunging the system into decay.

A catalyst for change was necessary. But the precipitant was not an exogenous shock, although it lay outside district administration. A local school board that reflected the reform sentiments of a civic-minded elite provided the initial impetus for change. Lakeville's community setting and school boards differed sharply from those of the previous cases. Midville's boards, operating in a placid community, either rubber-stamped administrative actions or pushed their pet concerns. Johnstown's ideologically driven board politicized the district by bringing the turbulence and factional politics of the community into the operation of the schools; it has precipitated not development but decay.

Lakeville's environment changed from indifferent to supportive. The Lakeville board, an early product of this change, played an active role in generating community involvement. Indeed, the Lakeville experience suggests that an effective board should be both active and supportive. They must somehow manage to strike a pragmatic balance between seeking participation of community elite and general public on the one hand and protecting the district from conflict and politicization on the other. Similarly, they must learn both to trust in the professionalism of the administration and to vigorously monitor the system so that it escapes maintenance and avoids decay.

Lakeville also illustrates how a charismatic superintendent can use board and community support to mobilize the system for change. Wilcox used multifaceted and coordinated strategies to unfreeze the system and alter organizational patterns. These strategies were aimed at developing

1. proactivity and openness toward the environment,
2. a central leadership with a common administrative point of view on the primacy of delivery goals,
3. a lower locus of decisionmaking and a sense of shared responsibility,
4. trust and risk-taking at all levels of the system,
5. an integration of the loosely coupled schools that allows for individual and school variability and provides feedback for central coordination,
6. mechanisms for staff growth and peer interactions, and
7. a sense of professionalism and a sense that one's self-interest merged with that of the school district.

Had these aims been fully achieved and incorporated into the system, Lakeville would have completed its transition to a more developed state.

As Lakeville currently stands, these new organizational patterns have not yet been fully institutionalized—the district has not yet achieved a stable state of development. The district's change over the past decade constituted an impressive beginning, but its capacity for continuing and sustaining its own growth must be questioned. Its success thus far has depended in part on the charismatic leadership of Superintendent Wilcox, on an extraordinarily capable and supportive board, and on the availability of outside funds. These conditions do not currently exist in Lakeville—Wilcox has left, the present board is divided, and the district must cope with a tight financial situation. The system's ability to adapt to its new situation and to continue to develop will be tested in the next few years.

Lakeville's transformation has allowed us to characterize only part of the process of change leading from maintenance to development and only some of the characteristics of a developed system. The case of Sandwood is of a school district in a more advanced state of development, a district that has begun to institutionalize change.

VI. DEVELOPMENT IN PRACTICE

In the Lakeville case, we examined how a school district was able to "unfreeze" its organizational status quo and start the difficult passage to a more developed state. Was Lakeville's spurt of innovativeness dependent on special conditions—a charismatic superintendent, a supportive environment, and the influx of federal and state monies—and thus will it be short-lived? Will equilibrating forces be set in motion and so return Lakeville to its former state of maintenance? It is difficult to answer these questions because Lakeville's new organizational patterns have not yet become a stable part of the district's standard operating procedures—that is, its new organizational patterns have not become *institutionalized.*

In this section, we will examine Sandwood Public School System (SPSS), which underwent a basic reorganization beginning 15 years ago and has institutionalized new organizational patterns. Sandwood is remarkable because its present organizational patterns support routine examination and renewal of the district's educational program and supporting services. The school district has, in short, progressed toward a fairly high state of organizational development.

Although many problems remain to be solved in Sandwood, this district provides a concrete example of development. By describing Sandwood, we go beyond abstract conceptualizations to focus on the following empirical question: What organizational patterns characterize a school system that can routinely examine and renew itself in the face of external and internal change?

REORGANIZATION FOR CHANGE

Sandwood has developed not through any serendipitous circumstances or special events, nor through the appointment of a charismatic superintendent. Indeed, Sandwood's organizational development does not even reflect a supportive local environment of the type that blessed Lakeville. (The extraordinarily high rate of mobility in Sandwood in high socioeconomic as well as low income areas has precluded the formation of a dominant community power structure and an active citizenry.) Although this historically conservative community is more or less apathetic about the schools, the ultra-conservative local press tends to be highly critical of school operations.[1] Thus, SPSS's unusual state of development is not the result of unusual resources, or the product of peculiar events, or the consequence of a supportive community. Sandwood's accomplishments are the result of a self-conscious and sustained effort in institution building.

Sandwood has a longstanding reputation as a "good" school district, but system operations have not always evidenced the vitality, adaptability, and diversity that characterize Sandwood today. The genesis of the present district structure and

[1] One district administrator commented: "The Bagley press is against anything the looks 'progressive,' costs money, or moves away from the three R's." Another administrator added, "You have to go outside Sandwood to read anything good about our schools. Just last week, for example, there was an article in the Harbortown paper (another of the large cities in the state) asking why Sandwood could do so much better spending for so much less."

procedures can be found in a 1962 decision by the Board of Education to undertake a major reorganization of the Sandwood school system in anticipation of a significant increase (in fact, a doubling) of district enrollment. A management consulting firm was hired to study the district's needs and draw up a new plan. The resulting plan, which was the joint product of the consultants and district staff, called for the reorganization of district operations to aim for a downward delegation of authority and an increased amount of organizational "differentiation."[2]

The plan also stressed the need for the district to develop new leadership. The 1962 board, composed mainly of successful businessmen, were particularly receptive to the need for leadership. The board felt, according to a retired member, "If you want to get a job done, you should hire the best possible people to do it." As a result, when the board approved the new district organizational structure, it instructed the superintendent to launch a "youth movement," in which promising young education experts were recruited from the nation's top graduate programs and brought to Sandwood with a mandate to revitalize the district's educational practices.

None of the three key components in the board's reorganization plan—the downward delegation of decisionmaking authority, the creation of differentiated and specialized structures, and the reliance on "experts" to fill leadership roles—is a unique approach to the management of school systems. Yet these strategies were carried out in Sandwood in a way that promoted the genuine organizational development seen in the district today. Rather than trace the history of the plan, this section examines the resulting organizational pattern.

DOWNWARD DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY

During the 1960s and 1970s, many school districts instituted measures to control the loose coupling of schools. Management devices such as accountability, management by objectives, or baseline curricula were used to increase the uniformity of district operations. For example, Midville, like many other districts, installed regional decentralization to facilitate area administration. But rather than lowering the locus of decisionmaking, Midville's decentralization plan simply added another bureaucratic layer between the local school and the central administration.

The major actors in the Sandwood system diagnose loose coupling as a problem requiring increased central coordination, not increased control. They see formal decentralization, as well as other management devices designed to promote standardization and uniformity, as inefficient and, more important, as contrary to the best interests of educational practice.[3] Instead, Sandwood's central administrators believe there is no universal "best" educational practice or strategy—individual principals and teachers are in the best position to decide what is most effective and appropriate for their schools and their particular student body. The central assump-

[2] The management consulting literature stresses the importance of organizational differentiation, which in this context means the creation of specialized organizational units that need not be in the regular line operation of the school district. See Lawrence and Lorsch (1969).

[3] Regionalized decentralization is not thought to be efficient or economical—even for a district as large as Sandwood, which has a student enrollment of 125,000 and sprawls over 200 square miles—because it is seen as duplicating bureaucratic costs and functions that are more effectively managed from the central office.

tions underlying Sandwood's approach to coordination of school operations are diversity makes educational sense and decisions concerning the practices and policies of particular organizational units should be made by those closest to the unit's operation.

In line with this diagnosis, individuals at all levels of the school system have been given more authority to make decisions than is the usual case in comparable districts. For example, the directors of elementary and secondary education, whose positions in the district's formal organization chart are three levels below the superintendent, have considerable autonomy in making policy decisions about their own divisions (such as line item control over budget items). At one level higher, the assistant superintendent for elementary education together with the assistant superintendent for secondary education wield extensive operational power. For example, they were able to compile a report recommending changes in school boundaries. "In the old days," one of them told us, "this report would have been written and supervised from the deputy superintendent's level at the top."

Sandwood's principals exercise unusual latitude in deciding about the practices and policies in their schools. They have the freedom to make decisions in such day-to-day matters as adjustments in school starting and closing times, and they also have discretion to decide about their school's educational programs. The district supports the principal's power by allocating to every school discretionary funds that can be used however the school chooses (within legal and state education code restrictions). The district does not oversee these funds and does not even insist that principals use the district purchasing office to process their orders.[4] The assistant superintendent for secondary education made it clear to us that "if you are going to be innovative and foster change, discretionary authority is absolutely necessary."[5]

Discretionary authority helps change the pattern of decisionmaking in school life, but it might be merely symbolic without an accompanying change in attitudes about responsibility. Sandwood's central administrators have also pursued a policy aimed at changing the principals' perceptions of their roles: Principals are expected to be actively responsible for attacking problems in their schools.

In 1972, schools in an economically depressed area of town were experiencing an inordinately high level of vandalism and disruption. Deputy Superintendent for Operations John Acton arranged for principals from the affected schools to be his guests for cocktails and dinner at one of the city's finest restaurants. He told the group of the district's concern about the increasing vandalism and asked them to plan to improve the situation. Dr. Acton said to the principals, "You will get all the support you need from the central office, but this is your problem—now get busy and do something about it." A principal recalls his reaction quite vividly: "When a deputy superintendent invites you for dinner, really listens—and picks up the

[4] Many principals allow the school staff and parents to decide on the allocation of the school's discretionary funds. In about 10 percent of Sandwood's 98 schools, the principal does not even participate in the staff's and parents' decision. These funds have been used for such diverse purposes as knocking down walls to create an open-space classroom, hiring substitutes to free teachers for additional staff development efforts, field trips for the students, and the purchase of special equipment for labs and classrooms. One school, in a high-vandalism area, elected to use the funds to install electronic sensors that would alert district security in the event of building break-ins.

[5] As behavioral evidence of Sandwood's commitment to discretionary funds for principals, we note that in budget meetings where participants were struggling to make $3 million in cuts, all agreed discretionary funds should be inviolate.

tab—you know that the district is really concerned and willing to help you solve your problem. That really motivates you to tackle it and work hard."[6]

As a result of the dinner meeting, the principals on their own initiative formed a breakfast meeting group where they designed plans to deal with "their mutual" problem. When their recommendations involved personnel shifts or special funds, Dr. Acton acted quickly to give them the promised support. The principals' plan has had a positive effect: Although vandalism persists, it has been drastically reduced; and student and faculty morale in the troubled area is reported, by both participants and outside observers, to be vastly improved. Perhaps most important from the long-run standpoint of institutionalizing communications among schools, these principals have continued meeting to discuss their special problems and to share ideas and solutions.

Such challenges to principals are part of Dr. Acton's style of operation. Although he does not attempt to interfere in school operations or impose centrally prescribed methods, he expects principals to identify the most effective programs for their school and maintain an atmosphere of educational vitality. As a principal told us: "The central office gives you a lot of responsibility, but you have to come through." For example, on one of his frequent (and unscheduled) visits to classrooms, Acton found himself at an elementary school that he thought was "dead."[7] He immediately contacted the principal, told her of his assessment, and advised her that unless she could think up ways to change the program she would be moved to another school. Acton arranged for special district funding and for district resource personnel to work closely with the principal. With this support, the school has, in Acton's view, "completely turned around in one year." The important element was that the principal knew Acton wanted *her* to take responsibility for changing the school. Once she had done so she was given the opportunity and support to devise her own solutions.[8]

Teachers are also routinely aided by the district in their efforts to devise new solutions to the problems and needs of their classrooms. Two special district funds—the Teachers Development Committee (TDC) and Future Elementary Schools (FES)—have been established to support proposals for innovation initiated by classroom teachers. In addition, many teachers go directly to Acton to enlist his support

[6] This example is one of many in which Acton dealt directly with the schools, rather than through the four hierarchical levels between him and the schools. Neither he nor the central administrators consider such activities as an intervention or a violation of bureaucratic fiefdoms. Acton assumed a role of coordinator and troubleshooter, without interfering with normal district functions.

[7] Acton's unannounced site visits are part of his routine procedure. Because the visits are routine, they do not signal to a school's staff that something is wrong. Indeed, when we accompanied him on several tours, covering eight schools, we found that the staff warmly received him. Several principals and teachers petitioned him to approve requests—Acton seemed to take each request seriously—but most staff discussed their new ideas. In short, these routinized visits by a deputy superintendent constituted a feedback channel to the central office, something that was absent in Midville. Johnstown's board members also visited classrooms on an unscheduled basis, but many teachers felt these visits were threatening.

[8] Through intervention and support of this nature, Dr. Acton plays a critical "change agent" role in Sandwood and is central in setting a norm for innovation in the district. Among the principals we interviewed, Acton was consistently perceived as deeply committed to education, and to exploring and supporting new alternatives. One principal, for example, said: "It's a real joy to work for Acton. We can do anything we want if we just get off our backsides." Another principal observed: "I've never been turned down [by Acton] on an idea." Another principal testified: "I'd walk through fire for him; I'd also take flak from him, because he has faith in me." Acton, in short, plays a major role in making risk-taking "safe" and monitoring the vitality and quality of district schools.

in obtaining the necessary funds, or even bending district regulations, to try out their ideas.[9]

Given this dispersion of authority and spreading of discretionary resources throughout the system, it is not surprising to find that the educational programs and practices in Sandwood display unusual diversity. Indeed, we were struck on our visits by how different each school "felt." Sandwood has what one district official called "the widest course offering of any district its size in the country." Indeed, the district is currently moving to take advantage of new state education legislation that permits modification in secondary school graduation requirements to increase diversity even further.[10]

Along with diversity, there is a feeling among most staff we interviewed that their judgment counts. This belief seems associated with a marked sense of professionalism and efficacy among staff in Sandwood—from the classroom teacher to central office administrators.[11] Functionaries merely serving their time seem to be the exception. We believe Sandwood's decentralization of authority is partly responsible for this unusual organizational climate. Staff are given an opportunity to feel that they can affect the district goal of improving educational delivery.

In summary, rather than imposing uniformity and bureaucratic controls, Sandwood's central administrators aimed, on the one hand, to develop a common sense of purpose and shared responsibility among the staff and, on the other hand, to establish channels for feedback that would allow central coordination, monitoring, and support. This approach to the loose coupling of schools seems to encourage diversity and a highly professional organizational climate.[12] Moreover, these district attitudes reinforced incentives provided for the staff to view innovation as part of their regular professional activities, not as a special or ancillary job.

AN INFRASTRUCTURE FOR CHANGE

The idea behind the development of specialized organizational units to aid school district management is a good one: It is assumed that specialists outside of

[9] Acton encourages these alternative system channels and, in fact, is strongly opposed to rigid "line-and-staff" arrangements. It is certainly unusual for a deputy superintendent to say, "If you want to get anything new underway, you have to go around the system."

[10] In Acton's view, the old requirements (and consequently the old secondary curriculum) were "too regimented and too stereotypic; they do not give students the leeway to pursue special interests." Under the direction of the assistant superintendent for secondary education, Acton convened a committee of secondary school educators to draw up new curricula and course offerings for the secondary schools and to rewrite the district graduation requirements to give students more flexibility in their course selection. In addition to increased flexibility, a companion objective of this committee activity is to devise a plan that will ensure that every student will graduate with a "salable skill"—academic or vocational.

[11] By efficacy, we mean the extent to which a person feels that he or she can achieve a desired result. Our impression of this widespread feeling among Sandwood's staff is based on interviews, classroom observations, and attendance at staff meetings. We also have some survey evidence that supports our impression. Rand's Change Agent study conducted a survey of a sample of 33 Sandwood teachers who had participated in a federally supported innovation. The average score of these teachers, admittedly a select group, was significantly higher than the average score of all other teachers from districts across the nation studied by the Change Agent research. Efficacy is highly and positively correlated with improved outcomes from innovative projects. See Berman and McLaughlin, 1977; Armour et al., 1976.

[12] Unlike the situation in Midville or Johnstown, in Sandwood central administrators are not absorbed in political and bureaucratic "games." For example, Midville's cabinet meetings deal almost exclusively with the fending off of crises or with bureaucratic assignments. Johnstown's administrative meetings have fallen into disuse. In contrast, Sandwood's cabinet meetings (and those of Lakeville under Superintendent Wilcox) are policymaking sessions. They are marked by spirited debate after which all

the normal line functions can efficiently provide services to the schools and information to the central office. However, during the 1960s and 1970s, urban school districts established specialized units, but without much effect. For example, Midville's Curriculum Assistance Division merely perpetuated the school's insularity because of the district's perverse personal and bureaucratic incentives. Moreover, the product of Midville's R&D specialists and trained evaluators went unused and was largely irrelevant to school-level delivery concerns. The existence of specialized units, then, should not be the sole criterion of organizational development; the specialized units need to be integrated into central decisionmaking and routinely serve delivery purposes. Unlike Midville, Sandwood's specialized units play an effective role for both management and educational delivery.[13]

The Programs Division in Sandwood was explicitly established to play the role of change agent. Its charge is unusual. Deputy Superintendent Acton characterized its mission in the following way: "When the district was reorganized, we created six divisions at the level of assistant superintendent—five to keep the system running smoothly, and one—the Programs Division—to shake it up.[14] Under the auspices of this division are such activities as programs development, materials development, in-service education, and the instructional media center—all designed and managed with the objective of questioning and upgrading present practices and traditional ways of doing things.

To realize this objective, the Programs Division relies on curriculum specialists. Sandwood's curriculum specialists are an extraordinarily talented group of individuals who were recruited through a continuing nationwide search for the "best brains available anywhere."[15] Their primary tasks are to assist teachers and principals by providing pedagogic leadership, being on call to deal with special problems, and stimulating grass roots innovation. Specialists are also expected to keep abreast of the latest research and theory development in their areas and to share these developments with the Sandwood staff.[16] The assistant superintendent for the Programs Division summed up the role of the specialists in the following way: "We expect them to be in tune with national developments; they're supposed to stir things up. This whole operation is geared toward destroying the status quo, and the specialists are critical to this effort."

In interviewing teachers, we found that specialists do have considerable contact with building-level staff, though not as much as some teachers, particularly in Title

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sides close ranks to support the consensus decision. Sandwood's central office staff are not only usually effective in their roles, but there appears to be little "backbiting" or jostling for position in the district. Sandwood staff appear to be pleased with what they are doing and to be getting the job done; there is little competition between actors for the other man's job.

[13] Sandwood's specialized units are staffed by professionals who function as experts in their role. In contrast to Lakeville, few if any of these actors play dual or multiple roles. In Lakeville, generalists can play a strategic role in destroying the fiefdoms that characterize maintenance. However, if change is to be institutionalized, specialists operating within the framework of a common purpose appear to provide greater stability.

[14] The other five divisions at the assistant superintendent level are business services, personnel, elementary, secondary, and student services.

[15] In Midville, curriculum "specialists" are teachers on special assignment who have achieved their position as part of the district's internal career ladder, rather than by extensive graduate training. Sandwood's major specialists are of the caliber of assistant superintendents.

[16] As a district official commented: "The curriculum specialists are supposed to be on the 'cutting edge' of their field. The district also expects them to belong to national associations and attend conferences—in fact, the district expects that the curriculum specialists will take leadership roles in these activities."

I schools, would like. Most teachers expressed considerable respect for the specialists' abilities and dedication. Many new ideas can be traced to efforts of the specialists. Moreover, by their continuing contact with the staff, they provide another institutional mechanism for vertical and horizontal integration of the schools. The assistant superintendent for the Programs Division is reasonably satisfied with the performance of the curriculum specialists in regard to special innovative projects but hopes they can provide schools with more assistance for the standard educational program.

Another unit of the Programs Division plays an important role in promoting innovativeness in the Sandwood system—the Special Projects Office. This office supports change efforts in Sandwood by securing special funding for the district and by serving as the conduit and catalyst for special project proposals. "Grantsmanship" in Sandwood displays a judicious blend of "hustle" with a genuine concern for trying out new ways to solve educational problems. Sandwood has been as proactive in the search for outside funding as Lakeville, because the Special Projects Office is unusually industrious in finding out where the money is and what the funding agencies want. The Special Projects staff are responsible for finding out what is happening in legislative committees at the state and federal levels and anticipating changes in funding sources. Several district staff members have participated in drafting state legislation that either protects or is favorable to the district. The director of the Special Projects Office spends a considerable amount of time in Washington, D.C., lobbying for the continuation of impact aid—an important source of federal revenue for this district. As a result of these efforts, Sandwood has been awarded more than its expected share of state and federal funds.

Although Sandwood has received grants for special projects that the district did not take seriously, these opportunistically motivated projects are the exception. Typically, the process of proposal development supports the district's commitment to grass roots decisionmaking and broad-based institution building. The large majority of the federally funded projects in Sandwood were originated by teachers and principals, often after stimulation by the curriculum specialists or the Special Projects Office.

District officials believe that "the key to change is getting the early commitment of key groups of people." In line with this belief, Sandwood has established the following procedure: The Special Projects Office oversees the proposal development and submission process, which is explicitly structured to promote broad-based support for a special project. In conjunction with curriculum specialists, the Special Projects director participates in proposal formulation. He works with teachers to assist them in writing the proposal to "get it through the hoops." He has commented that he doesn't "like to act as a screen. I feel my job is really to help good proposals, but if an idea comes along that really doesn't strike me, I don't sit on it either."

An early step in proposal development is the presentation of the project to the district's Instructional Council, which is a group composed of teachers, students, high-level administrators, principals, and parents. Often the proposal comes to this group as an idea, and the council helps formulate a plan. The main job of the Instructional Council is to "pick up on problems in the proposal, suggest remedies, and build acceptance for the project in the school community."

After the revised proposal has cleared the Instructional Council, it goes to the Budget Division, where project costs are calculated and hidden costs to the district

are identified. The proposal then goes to the Executive Council—the superintendent's cabinet composed of central office administrators. The Executive Council gives final clearance, before the proposal is put on the school board agenda. The director of the Special Projects Office told us that it is rare that a proposal gets cut off at this level: "It is generally just a rubber stamp."[17] Thus, the main clearing house for special projects rests primarily with the Instructional Council, the group designed to represent all levels and interests in the school community.

This entire process of proposal development can be seen as an institutionalized process of mobilizing district commitment to innovative projects. In purely formal terms, Midville's proposal process is somewhat similar to Sandwood's. Yet Midville's process does not promote district commitment, because Midville's administrators feel they must guard their personal and bureaucratic self-interest. In contrast, the Sandwood staff tend to define their self-interest in terms of the district's broad concern with educational delivery. Consequently, the various actors in the proposal process seem to be guided by a common interest. All groups and individuals seem to review proposals with an eye to the eventual incorporation of project ideas or activities. Deputy Superintendent Acton commented: "We rarely undertake a project unless we are confident that we can pick it up after federal funding stops, if it looks like a good thing. Very few of Sandwood's innovative projects have actually disappeared."[18]

Another specialized structure in the Sandwood system that contributes to the support for district activities, policies, and innovative efforts is the Council/Conference structure, which consists of regular and frequent working meetings among staff and parents in groups that *cut across* districts' divisional lines of authority. Representatives of teachers, administrators, and parents meet in separate conference groups, and they use the Instructional Council as a forum where all of these interests can be heard and addressed. It is hoped that this scheme will provide institutionalized channels for two-way feedback flow and promote consensus-building within the district.

District support for an effective Council/Conference structure reflects a tacit assumption on the part of district officials that a public school system has multiple purposes, interests, and goals. Sandwood has avoided drafting the precise, or "prioritized," goal statements that are found in Midville. Instead, within the very general district objective of "enhancing educational delivery," the Council/Conference structure is designed to provide an institutionalized ongoing process whereby agreement can be reached on a constantly changing set of subgoals. In other words, Sandwood has attempted to build an infrastructure whereby consensus can be achieved on a set of clearly defined *means*, without attempting to unambiguously define the district's goals.

Formal agreement on specific goals would, in the view of many district officials, not only be difficult (perhaps impossible), but it would also be counterproductive: It would inhibit the district's ability to respond flexibly to new situations. Instead, the district has sought to establish the legitimacy of an ongoing process of consen-

[17] Our search of Executive Council reports and of Board minutes confirmed that the district supports 'proposals reaching the Executive Council.

[18] Rand's Change Agent Study found that many innovations are often not continued after the end of federal funding because the district did not actively plan at the outset for the project's eventual incorporation into district procedure. See Berman and McLaughlin, 1977.

sus building that recognizes and supports institutional inconsistencies and individual differences. The Council/Conference structure, in the words of an official, helps to "support cross-pollination and agreement."

Sandwood's commitment to the Council/Conference structure does not appear to be ephemeral. On the contrary, a specialized unit has been established as a troubleshooter to help the development of the Council/Conference system. The Systems and Procedures Unit, whose director reports to the superintendent, was set up specifically to "monitor organizational effectiveness and the efficiency of organizational dynamics." It is the responsibility of this unit to monitor communication flows and to evaluate, in formative terms, decisionmaking within Sandwood. In the words of the director:

> The problem in many organizations is that after a body or a committee is set up, it is let go. It needs to be constantly monitored and assisted in solution of problems. I do the monitoring in Sandwood myself—either by sitting in on meetings, or by talking with participants. I also keep my eye on all of the policy and regulation changes that are made by any division to see that they don't conflict or set up overlapping responsibilities or friction between departments. I am also trying to get the various groups to ask questions about the process: "Why are we participating? What is our conceptual framework?" In this way, I am able to keep a finger on the dynamics of the organization and make sure that all "channels" are functioning.

In summary, Sandwood has developed a series of routinized institutional procedures that cut across the line-staff organizational hierarchy. These intermeshing structures further the objective of integrating the loose coupling of school districts —of promoting diversity within a context of central coordination. And they simultaneously provide an infrastructure for change by imbedding specialized change agents into central delivery activities, by establishing two-way feedback channels, and by regularizing the participation of staff at all levels. This infrastructure has helped to make innovation a standard operating procedure in Sandwood.

CHANGE AS PROBLEM SOLVING

Once the process of change has been institutionalized—power dispersed, professionalism rewarded, responsibility shared, loose coupling integrated, risk-taking routinized, an infrastructure for innovation established—then the idea of change loses its threatening quality. The catalogue of fears recited by school district managers—throwing the system off balance, provoking external disruption and internal dissatisfaction, and precipitating the district's decline—lose their persuasiveness. And the strategies of temporizing and conflict avoidance no longer appear to be "rational" courses of action. In this context, change can be used as a problem-solving strategy for dealing with improving normal system functioning, as it is in Sandwood. Thus, although many districts make marginal adjustments or incremental changes in the face of pressures from the outside or internally identified needs, Sandwood's usual response to pressures is to address the precipitating cause and seek remediation through significant, often bold, changes in system operations.

The creation of the Culver Career High School illustrates Sandwood's willingness to risk sweeping change in response to an identified district trouble spot.

Before 1972, Culver High School had been what the deputy superintendent for operations called a "criminal institution." The high school is located in the city's black area, and its student enrollment was all black. The school had a history of vandalism, truancy, and high dropout rates. Culver students were regularly in and out of jail or juvenile courts. Instruction at the facility all but came to a halt as student discipline problems occupied faculty attention.

Deputy Superintendent Acton did not see the problems at Culver as amenable to the simple infusion of new resources or new programs. In his view, the school's viability could be regained only if planning and operations began anew from the ground up. Consequently, the deputy superintendent and the director of SPSS's vocational and career education program approached Culver's principal with the idea of turning this continuation school into a career high school that would serve all students of the district, regardless of race or social class. The school was to be for students who were interested in leaving high school with skills in a trade or who wanted a special academic schedule that would permit them to accelerate the completion of their high school diploma. The principal agreed with the deputy superintendent's plan, and the school was closed.

Culver Career High School was reopened a semester and a summer later with a new staff who were interested in the new program and committed to making it work. The principal and the staff had spent the summer planning the new school program. Although the first class of students electing to attend the school were whites from other parts of the city, the student body is becoming integrated as the school loses its reputation as a reformatory. As a measure of the success of this gamble on the deputy superintendent's part, as well as the effective planning and operation of the school staff, the delinquency rate at the school has dropped to almost zero, vandalism has decreased to an insignificant level, neighborhood acceptance and teacher morale are high, and the larger business community has invested its time and resources to help the school's work study program.

Another example of a complete changeover undertaken in response to what the district perceived to be a severe problem also involved a population of disadvantaged students. The strategy of change in this case is noteworthy because it involved the complete rebuilding of an institution, as was the case with Culver, and it emphasized people, not products, and process, not technology.

Herrod Elementary School, the target for this change effort, had a longstanding reputation as one of the "worst" elementary schools in the district: Reading scores were at the bottom of the barrel, kids were disinterested, vandalism was high, the community was highly critical. A decision was made to empty the school of all staff—from the principal on down to the janitors. New staff had to satisfy two criteria: (1) a genuine commitment to working with disadvantaged, minority students, and (2) a track record of effectiveness with disadvantaged students. The local teachers' organization at first objected to the possible transgression of seniority rules implied by the use of these criteria, but Dr. Acton called a meeting and presented a challenge: "Don't you believe that teachers make a difference? Let's put people in this school who have shown they can make a difference with disadvantaged kids and see what happens. . . . Let's show that the staff can turn a school around." The teachers' organization agreed, and the transfers were made.

Although the improvement of test scores was cited as the rationale for starting the program, it is also clear that district officials felt that the answer to improving

reading scores lay in the attitudes and special skills of teachers of minority students and in the involvement of parents in the learning process. The proposal submitted to the board for district support is extraordinary because it contains an explicit plan for the mobilization and consensus-building period of launching the project, and it contains no plan for the delivery of educational services themselves. The overriding objective outlined by the proposal is to start the project off on the right foot and then trust that the staff selected will identify the best ways to proceed.

The plans for project initiation included an extensive and detailed process whereby new members of the school staff would be screened and selected. In an unprecedented move, the principal was selected by a broadly representative group —local parents, minority groups' representatives, specialists, teachers, and principals. The chosen principal, Ray Barry, then formed a screening committee of himself, teachers, support staff, and parents to select the remainder of the staff.

Once the staff were chosen, it was up to them to develop their program. Not only was the school left to its own initiative, the district also insisted that the staff use no experimental curriculum or special resources. To quote from the proposal: "The final evaluation must show the effects of teacher attitude on student achievement, not the effectiveness of a new curriculum program."

In the view of the principal, that is the way it has worked out. "It's not the program, it's the people." Ray Barry and his staff had the leeway they needed to develop their program as they saw fit and indeed the explicit responsibility for doing so. Barry also reports that he has received all the support he has asked for from the central office to carry out the school's program. He related to us an example of district cooperation involving the school's efforts to establish rapport and close ties with the community. The community had requested that the school celebrate Martin Luther King Day—a day not considered an official holiday in the district. With district support, Barry made the day an "unofficial holiday"; the school was open to the community, and student performances were given.

Reading scores at Herrod are now showing a slow but steady rise. More indicative of the success of this bold strategy, however, is the enthusiasm of students and parents, as evidenced by answers to attitude surveys and extensive parent involvement of a kind that is unusual for a poor minority area.

SUMMARY: THE STABILITY OF DEVELOPMENT

Sandwood Public School System is a fairly developed school district; that is, it has a high capacity for self-criticism and for constantly seeking the most effective way to adapt to changing institutional and environmental pressures. The source of this capacity cannot be defined simply: It consists of complex organizational patterns that have evolved heuristically from the efforts of the school district's staff to adapt to changing needs. In summarizing these patterns, we will cite management practices and district beliefs and norms that seem to support organizational development. But, more important, we will emphasize how these patterns reflect and reinforce each other, for therein lies the key to the stability of organizational development.

In addition to its open and active stance toward the community and the larger environment, Sandwood has widely dispersed authority throughout the school

system so that middle-level managers, principals, teachers, and parents participate in making operational decisions to a far greater extent than in most school districts. This "downward delegation of authority" can work because the district has created an organization culture that promotes a sense of responsibility, encourages risk-taking, and rewards professionalism—in brief, a feeling of mutual trust. As Sandwood's deputy superintendent for administration remarked, "In a large organization like this, you have to ruffle feathers a little to get any change—but there has to be a mutual trust that underlies this or you wouldn't have positive change. You'd have the beginning of system destruction."

The district also has created a variety of incentives and management procedures for downward delegation of authority and broad-based participation. For example, Sandwood has an infrastructure consisting of specialized units that provide services for change efforts, bring in new ideas, and attempt to "shake up" the system. The Council/Conference structure aims to provide a means whereby information can move both up and down in the system and consensus can be built between multiple interests and organizational units. Once again, however, without mutual trust and its various cultural concomitants, the Council/Conference structure would be less effective as a feedback channel and the incentives for the teachers to experiment with alternatives to present practice would likely be eclipsed by more bureaucratically "safe" concerns of maintenance and political survival.

Sandwood's mode of dealing with the loose coupling of the schools—the downward delegation of authority, the sharing of power, and support for diversity—has ironically achieved a measure of "consistency" and a common sense of purpose that other districts have sought to achieve through management controls and standardization of practice.[19] Although Sandwood has enormous diversity in its education programs and practices, the variability in educational quality between schools and classrooms is remarkably low. In terms of classroom life, there is not a sharp disparity between inner city classrooms and classes in the affluent suburbs. In this system—where diversity is valued and where practitioners are treated as professionals and given the organization support to carry out the decisions that seem to be most appropriate for their particular school or classroom—staff are most free to make a difference.

[19] Issues of delivery effectiveness aside, one very obvious result of this organizational strategy is the generation of extraordinarily high staff morale. The morale of the Sandwood staff—teachers, principals, assistant superintendents, and secretaries—and their pride in their system is extremely high.

VII. ADAPTATION WITH AND WITHOUT CHANGE

This study began with the aim of shedding light on the propensity of school districts to innovate yet not to change in significant ways. By tracing a specific project in Midville, we advanced an explanation for this phenomenon based on organizational dynamics, not on the characteristics of the innovation.

1. The adoption of an innovation can serve as a defense mechanism for school districts in their need to respond to their uncertain environment,
2. During implementation, the innovation is adapted to meet organizational conditions so that it reinforces rather than supplants existing organizational patterns, and
3. These same organizational conditions perpetuate the illusion that change is occurring.

In short, adaptation without improving educational performance can be viewed as part of a mechanism whereby school districts maintain their status quo.

This explanation raises basic questions that go beyond issues of innovation: How do districts adapt and change over time? What organizational patterns and environmental conditions explain their adaptive behavior?

To explore these questions, we examined the responses of five districts to internal and external pressures for change. Our field research was guided by a theoretical framework that assumed

1. All school districts face five systemic dilemmas—delivery diversity, systemic integration, boundary openness, multiple goals, and change;
2. Each school district deals with these dilemmas in characteristic ways that define their state as an adaptive system; and
3. The stable states of school districts can be categorized into two ideal types—maintenance and development.

This report has presented case materials to explore the plausibility of the above assumptions and identify the organizational patterns and environmental conditions that characterize maintenance and developmment and make them stable states. The following summary is organized to highlight the theoretical differences between maintenance and development, considered more as ideals than as actual operating school districts. The study was exploratory. We consider the summary to be less a statement of findings than a way to present tentative hypotheses.

MAINTENANCE COMPARED WITH DEVELOPMENT

The school districts of Midville and pre-1965 Lakeville appear quite different in organizational particularities and environmental conditions. Yet they adapted to their different situations in similar ways. We believe their common properties represent characteristics of the ideal state of maintenance:

1. *Delivery uniformity.* All (stable) school districts establish routinized procedures in the areas of personnel, curriculum, budgeting, and delivery operations. But it is characteristic of maintenance systems that their routinized procedures embody incentives and expectations that discourage diversity in teaching practices.
2. *Loose coupling.* Schools in a maintenance system are isolated from each other and from the central administration. The organizational patterns that define this unintegrated structure are a lack of trust, a segmented and partitioned decisionmaking structure, and a top-down style of authority relationships. Because feedback between administrative levels consists of symbolic reporting that does little more than satisfy bureaucratic pressures, it merely reinforces the status quo. Feedback that might disrupt the status quo seldom occurs because of perverse incentives and a lack of trust throughout the system.
3. *Subordination of delivery concerns.* The operative goals of a maintenance system tend to be defined by bureaucratic and political concerns. This subordination of delivery goals can take different forms. For example, in Midville, the guarding of personal and bureaucratic interests contributed to a lack of common purpose in the delivery area. Moreover, the absence of a sense of unified concern with delivery exacerbated a variety of problems of loose coupling-school insularity, mistrust between administrative levels, inadequate and inaccurate feedback, segmented decisionmaking, and top-down authority relations. And, in Johnstown, the preoccupation with political concerns meant that delivery issues were identified and shaped in ways that deepened the gap beteen central administration and deliverers. In both cases, protecting the system from internal "conflict" or external "threats" became a major goal and constraint.
4. *Closed boundary.* The ideal maintenance system attempts to seal itself off from outside pressures and influences. The way boundaries are protected depends on the local environmental setting and the nature of exogenous pressures. For example, in the indifferent community setting of Midville, administrators were mainly reactive; insofar as possible, pressures were ignored, absorbed, co-opted, or isolated. When other defenses failed, changes were incrementally added to the system without replacing existing core processes.
5. *Stability as a constraint.* The incentives and control structures in the maintenance system act perversely to discourage risk-taking. There is a reliance on formal authority relations, routinized behavior, control, uniformity, and "safe" reactions to pressures. Significant change is feared as threatening to system as well as personal interests; it could be destabilizing and precipitate decay. The net result is that individual and programmatic decisionmaking at all levels is incremental.

Although we listed the above characteristics point by point, they are self-reinforcing and fit together. For example, the subordination of delivery concerns reinforces an emphasis on delivery uniformity and discourages risk-taking at all levels of the maintenance system. Or, the attempt to deal with environmental pressures and uncertainties by "closing" the system's boundaries is the other side of the coin of internal bureaucratic control. Attempts to change or manipulate only

one component of this syndrome face equilibrating forces from the cultural and structural forces associated with the other components. In short, maintenance systems adapt but in ways that avoid significant change.

The issues faced by school districts that have attained a state of development can be just as difficult as those faced by maintenance systems. The difference between these states is that the ideal developed district has the capacity to adapt continually to its unique, uncertain, and constantly changing environment in ways that enhance its delivery function. The institutional capacity for this type of continual adaptation consists of a systemic ability to reexamine and replace routinized procedures; moreover, reexamination and replacement themselves become standard operating procedures.

The ideal developed school district has the following characteristics:

1. *Delivery diversity.* The developed system encourages delivery diversity because it believes diversity is both inevitable and desirable. The organizational incentive and specialized support structures promote staff development, discretionary choices, peer interactions, and professionalism. Because high quality delivery is supported, expected, and monitored, the variability in educational quality between schools and classrooms is low even though diversity in delivery is high.
2. *Integrated loose coupling.* The developed district deals with system integration by dispersing decisionmaking power throughout the system rather than husbanding it at the center or partitioning it into segmented fiefdoms (cf. Midville). Instead of attempting to impose bureaucratic controls, the system seeks integration by (a) delegating authority downward within a central framework that has representative and intermeshing policymaking committees cutting across line and staff divisions and that emphasizes shared responsibility; (b) instituting feedback channels that allow central coordination, monitoring, and support; (c) establishing improved educational delivery as the primary and common system purpose, which enables the staff to identify themselves as professionals and to see their self-interests as consistent with those of the district; and (d) promoting mutual trust.
3. *Primacy of delivery concerns.* The developed district establishes the primacy of delivery concerns. This priority neither denies nor ignores political and bureaucratic concerns. On the contrary, it implies increased activity in both areas. However, political and bureaucratic activities become strategic means to advance delivery goals. Without the primacy of delivery, integration based on trust and professionalism would be unlikely.
4. *Boundary openness.* The developed system looks outward, tries to reduce uncertainty, and is proactive toward both its local community and the larger environment. It seeks outside information about national and state political and educational trends, lobbies state and federal governments and educational policymaking bodies, and vigorously pursues outside funding opportunities. These activities are not isolated ends in themselves but are fed into long-range planning that serves delivery concerns. The relationship of the ideal developed system to the local setting depends on contextual factors—e.g., whether the community power structure is sup-

portive, indifferent, or demanding; whether the political and social situation is placid or turbulent; and whether the cultural norms of the community are consonant with those of the district. Given the variability of environmental conditions, there is not one "best" behavior for school districts, but there is a general orientation toward the local setting that characterizes development: The developed district strikes a pragmatic balance between (a) attempting to maximize the support of and contributions from a broad base of the community and (b) retaining its professional autonomy. This pragmatic balance recognizes the openness and interdependence of the district and the local community.

5. *Institutionalized change.* A continual process of significant change is viewed as desirable and essential. Cultural norms—e.g., risk-taking and professionalism—support an expectation and atmosphere for change at all levels; organizational structures and incentives—e.g., specialized change agents and regularized participation of staff in proposal generation—establish an infrastructure that makes the initiation and implementation of change a standard operating procedure for problem solving. In this context, change is not destabilizing because change efforts are undertaken only if a consensus over needs (not means) can be formed, and the new practices are routinized into every-day operations and replace rather than compete with or simply disrupt old practices.

A FINAL WORD

We have characterized two basic ways that school districts adapt and change over time. Maintenance and development are, of course, ideal types and do not fully or exactly capture the complex realities that constitute school district life. Nonetheless, we see in these stable states underlying organizational patterns that define limits as well as possibilities for significantly changing local school districts.

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